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FOUR PLAYS

TO HAVE THE HONOUR
ARIADNE, OR BUSINESS FIRST
PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN IN SLIPPERS
SUCCESS

By

A. A. MILNE



CHATTO AND WINDUS
LONDON

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TO HAVE THE HONOUR

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

SIMON BATTERSBY.
ANGELA (*his daughter*).
JENNIFER.
PARLOURMAID.
CAPTAIN HOLT.
ETHEL HOLT.
MRS. FAITHFULL.
IMOGEN FAITHFULL.
DOCTOR AINSLIE.
PRINCE MICHAEL.
JAMES OLIVER.

*The living-room in Simon Battersby's cottage, Wych
Trentham.*

ACT I. - - - - Before dinner.
ACT II. - - - - After dinner.
ACT III. - - - - Next morning.

THIS play was first produced by Sir Gerald du Maurier
at Wyndham's Theatre on April 22, 1924, with the
following cast :

<i>Simon Battersby</i>	-	-	-	H. O. NICHOLSON.
<i>Angela</i>	-	-	-	FAITH CELLI.
<i>Jennifer</i>	-	-	-	MADGE TITHERADGE.
<i>Captain Holt</i>	-	-	-	BASIL LODER.
<i>Ethel Holt</i>	-	-	-	UNA VENNING.
<i>Mrs. Faithfull</i>	-	-	-	GRACE LANE.
<i>Imogen</i>	-	-	-	JOAN CLEMENT SCOTT.
<i>Dr. Ainslie</i>	-	-	-	ERIC STANLEY.
<i>Prince Michael</i>	-	-	-	GERALD DU MAURIER.
<i>James Oliver</i>	-	-	-	GEORGE PENN.
<i>Parlourmaid</i>	-	-	-	DORIS COOPER.

ACT I

The Scene is the Living-room in the country cottage of the BATTERSBYS (father and daughter), a room of oak-beams, distempered walls and lattice windows. At the back, between the windows is a door, wide open to the garden. There is a door on the right which leads to the other inhabited parts of the house. Along the left side of the room a staircase ascends easily, to meet at right angles a low gallery from which bedrooms may be reached. The door on the left of the gallery is that of ANGELA'S room. To the right the gallery leads to BATTERSBY'S room and the bathroom. Underneath the stairs is a "glory-hole" with a curtain across it.

It is nearly 8 o'clock on a warm evening in May. Being summer time it is still full daylight, and no attempt has been made to pretend otherwise. The women's dresses must take their chance. Time enough to light up after dinner, particularly as electricity has not yet discovered Wych Trentham.

ANGELA, aged 18, half-dressed, in rather a casual wrap, cigarette-holder in mouth, is moving about the room with a slow, indifferent grace, which is much too charming to be a physical attribute only. Her indolence, both of voice and movement, is part of herself; she has the air—odd, and therefore attractive, on such a youthful prettiness—of living in another world, with a faint smile for this one. At present she is tidying

up the room for her dinner-party ; not with any sort of fussiness ; but in the care-free manner of one to whom it has occurred casually in the middle of her dressing that Royalty may be here at any moment, and that her father's dog-bitten slippers may be in any corner of the room. While we watch her, she stoops down and collects one from underneath the sofa ; looks thoughtfully about, moves a chair and discloses the other one. She takes the pair and drops them in the glory-hole. Then she speaks, raising her voice a little.

ANGELA. Are you out of the bath, Father ?

(She goes on tidying: old newspapers now. BATTERSBY opens the door of his bedroom and looks out.)

BATTERSBY. In a sense, yes, dear. I was just going in.

ANGELA *(to herself)*. Good Heavens !

BATTERSBY. I'm very quick. *(His head begins to go back.)*

ANGELA. You've put the wine out ? *(Silence. BATTERSBY's head stops its movement.)* Oh Lord, he hasn't.

BATTERSBY *(firmly, as he comes out, tying his dressing-gown)*. I am putting the wine out. *(He comes down the stairs ; a man of about 50, tall and bearded. In a towelled bath-gown and bedroom slippers he is unconventionally dressed for the dining-room, but you feel that he would always be a little like that. He has a quick, nervous way of talking, as if he were communing, rather apologetically, with himself.)* And the cigars. *(He goes into the glory-hole.)*

ANGELA *(resigned)*. Anyway, everybody knows we're always late in this house.

BATTERSBY *(coming out with two boxes of cigars)*. He wouldn't know.

ANGELA. Well, he will after to-night.

BATTERSBY. That's true. . . . There are only four of the good cigars left.

ANGELA. Surely he won't want more than four?

BATTERSBY. One requires a certain margin. . . . And then there are the others. This secretary fellow, Holt, and the Doctor, isn't it? Five with me.

ANGELA. I can't have my medical attendant puffing cigars in a hygienic house like this.

BATTERSBY. He'd prefer his pipe, in any case. So, if Holt has one of the cheaper brand, and the secretary and I have one good one each, that will leave two for the Prince. (*He puts the four Coronas on top of a broken box of cheaper ones.*) I shall tell Holt that the lower ones are nuttier. What about the wine? Champagne, I suppose.

ANGELA (*thoughtfully*). Emily broke the corkscrew the last time we had champagne. I wonder if we've got another.

BATTERSBY. That was an inferior brand. I have some better than that.

ANGELA. She'd better make a popping noise as she takes the cork out—to be on the safe side. Have you got enough?

BATTERSBY. A dozen.

ANGELA. Half a bottle each, and seven and a half bottles for the Prince. That ought to be all right.

BATTERSBY. My dear, you're looking forward to seeing him again just as much as I am. (*Opening an empty box*) I suppose you've got some cigarettes.

ANGELA. Some. . . . A Prince seems much more natural in the South of France. You sit next to him at lunch, and he's like anybody else. In England you feel a snob to be meeting him at all.

BATTERSBY. He invited himself. *We* didn't ask him.

ANGELA. I don't say I *am* a snob. I say I *feel* a snob.

BATTERSBY. Pooh! What's a Prince?

ANGELA. And I don't say I *feel* undressed, I *am* undressed. (*She pulls her wrap round her, and strolls upstairs.*) Go and tell Emily about the champagne.

BATTERSBY. Prince Michael Robolski of Neo-Slavonia—there are hundreds like that all over Europe. Penny plain, twopence coloured.

ANGELA (*on the stairs*). Yes, but only one in Wych Trentham. So we must make the most of him. (*She goes into her room.*)

BATTERSBY (*mumbling to himself*). What's a Prince in this democratic age? (*He goes kitchenwards.*)

(*The room is empty for a moment, and then JENNIFER appears at the garden door. She is 30, and so overflowing with vitality that some of it has got into her figure, and led to the word "buxom" being used. But she is tall enough, and big enough, mentally and physically, to carry it off with an air. She enjoys her world; she enjoys herself. It is jolly being JENNIFER. . . . Nobody is about, so she announces herself.*)

JENNIFER (*loudly*). How do you do? So good of you to come. (*Shyly*) So kind of you to ask me.

ANGELA (*off*). Oh, is that you, darling?

JENNIFER. Yes. At least it was yesterday. It's Jennifer.

ANGELA (*appearing in the gallery*). You're early, aren't you?

JENNIFER. I haven't really come yet. Am I dining?

ANGELA. Of course. Life and soul of the party.

JENNIFER. That's a comfort. I just stepped across to make sure. Last time, you remember, you sent me away and told me to come in afterwards. Luckily I had a little cold beef in the house. But there's something about sitting down to cold beef and pickles in

diamonds and a dress with no back to it—— Well, I just stepped across to make sure. And now I'll step back again.

ANGELA. Oh, stop now you're here !

(She disappears into her room for a moment, but JENNIFER doesn't realise that she is gone.)

JENNIFER. Good gracious, no ! And be introduced to the Prince with a crowd of others ? Never on your life ! I shall make a late but superb entry. All the men will look at me, and say, " Thank God, now we can eat " ; and all the women will look at me and say (quite correctly), " She came late on purpose, how like her " ; and the Prince will look at me, with a sudden reviving interest in what he had feared would be a very dull evening, and he'll say, "*Chère Madame*"—Or does he talk English ? *(There is no answer. She realises that she is alone.)* Have I been soliloquising all this time ?

ANGELA *(coming out)*. Sorry. What did you say ?

JENNIFER. My last words, when solitude descended upon me, were, " Does he talk English ? "

ANGELA. Perfectly. *(She comes slowly downstairs, still smoking.)*

JENNIFER. You should have mentioned it in your invitation. We've all been rubbing up our *Easy French in Six Lessons*. Well, then, the Prince will say, " Ah, dear Lady, this was indeed worth waiting for." No, that isn't very good. Well—anyhow—he'll look at me. And there's more of me to look at every day.

ANGELA. It is ridiculous of you to pretend that you're fat. Why do you ?

JENNIFER. I don't. No woman pretends she's fat. But every woman over thirty is afraid. On her thirtieth birthday she starts looking at herself in the glass, and saying, " Is it, or is it not ? " And a morning comes

when she says, "I wonder." I said it this morning. I say, where *is*—wherever it is?

ANGELA. Neo-Slavonia? I don't know. (*With a wave of her cigarette*) Down at the bottom on the right, I suppose. Somewhere.

JENNIFER. They make geography so quickly nowadays that I can't keep up with it.

ANGELA. A sort of buffer-state. (*She gives JENNIFER her ear-rings.*) There's a dear. I shall make a mess of my hair.

JENNIFER (*fixing them*). If one has never heard of a country, one always calls it "a sort of buffer-state." "Miss Angela Battersby was wearing the family drops." It must be difficult to feel very patriotic about a country which is only used so as to prevent two other countries from getting at each other. . . . Other ear.

ANGELA (*turning round*). It's never difficult to feel very patriotic.

JENNIFER. True. At least it's never difficult to feel how very unpatriotic other people are. . . . My buffer, 'tis of thee! . . . Is he very good-looking?

ANGELA. Not bad.

JENNIFER. And, to get down to my own class, what's the secretary like? . . . There!

ANGELA (*looking at herself in the glass.*) Thanks. . . . We haven't seen him. The Prince wrote to say that he was in London. Could he—and so on? I said, Delighted. Then he wrote that he and his secretary were at the Bull at Medenham. Could they—and so forth? I said, Of course. I suppose he's a sort of courier, equerry, orderly, or whatever you call it. I must go and finish myself. (*She goes.*)

JENNIFER. Well, speaking as a widow with no desire to marry again, I wish you luck.

JENNIFER. Good gracious, that's two of us after him already! (*Firmly*) I promise nothing, but that I shall enjoy myself to-night.

BATTERSBY. You always do. That's why you're so adorable.

ANGELA (*from the gallery*). Give him a smile, Jennifer, and get rid of him.

JENNIFER (*laughing happily*). I do like Battersbys. There's something about them. . . . *Au revoir!* (*She waves and is gone.*)

(BATTERSBY *at last goes up to his bath.*)

ANGELA. Hurry up, darling.

BATTERSBY (*impressively*). Have you ever seen forked lightning playing over water? That's me in my bath. (*He disappears.*)

(ANGELA *remains on the gallery, as EMILY, the parlourmaid, comes in with a tray of cocktails.*)

ANGELA. Are those the cocktails, Emily?

EMILY. Yes, miss.

ANGELA. Good. (*She comes slowly downstairs, still smoking.*)

EMILY. Ellen says I was to remind you about the French mustard, miss.

ANGELA. Mrs. Bulger is bringing some round. (*She takes a cocktail.*)

EMILY. Thank you, miss. (*Nervously*) Do I say, "Your Royal Highness," miss?

ANGELA. I really don't know. (*Drinking*) "Your Highness," I should think. But don't overdo it.

EMILY. Thank you, miss.

ANGELA. He won't throw anything at you, if you're wrong. (*Finishing her drink, and giving EMILY the glass*) You'd better take this out. (*She goes back to her room.*)

EMILY. Yes, miss.

[*She goes out.*]

(ROBERT and ETHEL HOLT *come in. He, a thick-set*

young soldier, is just over 30, she just under. He is a very serious young man, of a sort of determined intellectuality. Nothing escapes him. Even the lightest remark made by another requires thinking out. She is a bright helpmeet for such a man, the best of wives; with, like most wives, more intelligence than appears on the surface, and enough character to look after herself.)

ETHEL (*brightly*). Why, we're the first!

ROBERT (*feeling his chin*). I might have gone over it again, after all.

ETHEL. Better early than late. Particularly with royalty.

ROBERT. Hardly royalty, dear. Neo-Slavonia . . . one of these small buffer-states which have sprung up since the Armistice. All Mittel-Europa——

ETHEL (*loudly*). We're here, Angela! Are we very early? (*To ROBERT*) Yes, dear.

ROBERT. All Mittel-Europa——

ANGELA (*off*). Hallo! Is that the Holts?

ETHEL. You did say eight, didn't you?

ANGELA (*her head visible*). Did I? We're a bit late, I expect. Do you want to take anything off?

ETHEL. No, thank you, dear.

ROBERT. All Mittel-Europa——

ANGELA. Have a drink, Robert.

ROBERT. Thanks.

ANGELA. Cigarettes. (*A leather case sails into the room.*) Sorry.

ETHEL (*picking it up*). Thank you, dear.

ROBERT. All Mittel-Europa—— (*Holding out drink*) Will you have one, Ethel?

ETHEL. I don't think so. Well, perhaps I will. No, later, I think. (*She feels that she would like Royalty to see*

her drinking one.) I'll keep the Prince company. (*She laughs a little self-consciously.*) Cigarette?

ROBERT. No, thanks. (*He drinks.*)

ETHEL. I don't think I will either. What were you saying about all Mittel-Europa, dear?

ROBERT (*drinking*). All Mittel-Europa is in a state of flux just now.

ETHEL (*wearing her intelligent face*). I suppose so. Naturally. The War, of course. And the Peace.

ROBERT. The old Empires are splitting up—disintegrating. A sort of de-centralisation is going on. And so you get these small states coming into a precarious existence. Almost literally a case of "Here to-day and gone to-morrow."

ETHEL. You must talk it over with the Prince—if he talks English, as I suppose he does. They all do, don't they? I love listening to a good talk. Men talk so well, I always think. . . . They say he's very good-looking.

ROBERT. In many cases, of course, these little states have a connected history of their own. Centuries ago, before they were absorbed into some ramshackle empire, they had their own court and customs. You would probably find that they had never quite lost their individuality.

ETHEL. Individuality is the great thing, isn't it? Oh, did you find out whether we said Sir or Your Highness or Prince?

ROBERT. I shall say Sir, of course. You'd better not say anything.

ETHEL. Yes, that's best, isn't it?

(ANGELA *still in her wrap, empty cigarette-holder in her mouth, comes down the stairs.*)

ANGELA. Can I have my cigarettes?

ROBERT (*standing to attention*). Good-evening!

ETHEL (*brightly*). How *are* you, dear? Here you are. (*She goes, case in hand, to kiss her.*)

ANGELA (*taking the case and avoiding the kiss*). Thanks.

ETHEL (*with a little laugh*). We were just wondering what one called your Prince.

ANGELA (*putting in a cigarette*). As long as you don't call him *my* Prince, I don't mind what you call him. I've only met him once.

ROBERT. Oh, is that so? Monte Carlo, wasn't it? (*He strikes a match for her.*)

ANGELA. Thanks. . . . That village above Mentone—what's its name? Gorbio. We went there one day. With a party. Sort of picnic. He was one of them.

ETHEL (*with the air of one who knows Gorbio well*). Oh, yes.

ANGELA (*strolling upstairs again*). Shan't be long.

(*They watch her go.*)

ETHEL (*as soon as it is safe*). Well, if you ask *me*, I should say that Miss Angela Battersby must have made good use of that one day.

ROBERT (*uncomfortably, feeling that this is rather bad form*). Oh, I don't know.

ETHEL. I mean it quite nicely, of course. I can quite see the attraction. She's so very British, isn't she? That would always attract a foreigner.

ROBERT (*wondering if his country is being insulted*). British?

ETHEL. That air of "Oh, is that *you*?"

ROBERT. I don't see that that's British exactly. I should call it the individual rather than the type.

ETHEL. You know what I mean. (*With sudden inspiration*) "I'm Angela Battersby, take it or leave it." There!—that's what I mean. I think it's rather attractive.

ROBERT (*frowning*). But why British?

ETHEL. Well, that's rather what Englishmen say.

ROBERT (*wrestling*). H'm! . . . I see what you mean. . . . In a way—yes. . . . I suppose we do. (*He looks at her with an admiration that would be flattering if it were not surprised.*) Now what made you think of that?

ETHEL. Oh, I'm not such a fool as you think.

ROBERT. I have never thought so for a moment. Women often have surprising intuitions. . . . "I am an Englishman, take it or leave it." That's good, Ethel. I must tell the Prince that.

ETHEL (*eagerly*). You will say I said it, won't you?

ROBERT. My dear, of course.

ETHEL (*taking his arm*). Dear old boy! Let's go into the garden. It's nicer outside.

ROBERT (*coming*). You're quite right, Ethel. We do.

ETHEL. Do what?

ROBERT. That's why so many foreigners—

ETHEL (*as they approach the door*). Mrs. Faithfull—I didn't know *she* was coming.

(*But she is. For here they are at the door—the Queen of Wych Trentham, and her only child,*

IMOGEN. MRS. FAITHFULL, short and square, with the absolute assurance of a woman of 55 who has to her credit the achievements of wifehood and motherhood, and can therefore speak with authority on all subjects, exercises her prerogatives benignly. Practically all it comes to is that she expects the host to take her in. At present she is very much a mother to IMOGEN, who at 18, ANGELA's age, is a dumb school-girl in the royal presence, and a precocious one in her absence.)

ETHEL (*brightly*). Good-evening. Angela's still dress-

ing. We're early, so we're just going into the garden.
(*Which explains the whole thing.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL. Good-evening, Ethel. Good-evening, Captain Holt.

ROBERT. Good-evening. (*To IMOGEN*) How are *you*, Miss Faithfull?

(*IMOGEN smiles shyly.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL. Very well, thank you, Captain Holt.

ETHEL (*to IMOGEN*). What a sweet dress, dear. (*IMOGEN looks modest.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL. Pink suits us. We always try to keep to pink.

ANGELA (*off*). Is that you, Mrs. Faithfull? Do you want to take anything off, or would you rather have a cocktail?

MRS. FAITHFULL. I will just come up for a moment, I think. (*To IMOGEN*) You can keep that shawl on, dear, for the present. It suits you. (*She goes up the stairs.*)

ANGELA (*off*). Robert, give Imogen a cigar or a drink or something.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*firmly*). No, thank you, Captain Holt. (*She goes into ANGELA's room.*)

ETHEL (*to IMOGEN*). Come into the garden with us. It's cooler there.

ROBERT (*with glass*). Sure you won't?

IMOGEN (*to ETHEL*). Have *you* had one?

ETHEL. No, I don't think just yet, perhaps.

IMOGEN. Oh! (*She takes the drink.*) Then I will. And Mother will count and think it's your glass. (*Drinking*) I don't like the taste *very* much, do you? I suppose you get used to it. I say, aren't you excited about the Prince? Do you think he's a real Prince? Do you think he's in love with Angela? (*She drinks again.*) I don't think I like this very much.

ROBERT (*holding out his hand*). I shouldn't drink it if you don't like it.

IMOGEN (*before letting go of the glass*). Would you leave half of yours, Mrs. Holt?

ETHEL. I might. I do sometimes.

IMOGEN. Oh, then that's all right. (*To ROBERT*) Thank you. (*To ETHEL*) Do we curtsey?

ETHEL (*who hadn't thought of this*). Oh, no! I don't— (*Panic*.)

IMOGEN. I've been practising. Up in my room. (*She gives us one.*) It looks jolly, doesn't it? I've been doing it in front of the glass—mostly in a nightie. (*She gives us another, not so successful.*) It's easier in a nightie.

ETHEL. Oh, but Robert has just been explaining. Neo-Slavonia is only—

ROBERT. A sort of buffer-state.

IMOGEN. Mother says you just call him Prince Michael. I like "Sire" better, don't you? You've never met him, have you? I believe he's awfully good-looking.

ROBERT. It isn't like an English Prince, you know, Miss Faithfull. You know, in Europe, "Prince" is just a title like Duke or Count. That is to say—

ETHEL. Oh, is that so, Robert?

IMOGEN. Let's go into the garden, shall we? I won't smoke a cigarette, but if *you* would, Mrs. Holt, and blow the smoke in my hair, Mother will think I've been smoking, and then you'll be able to tell her afterwards that I haven't.

ETHEL (*her arm round IMOGEN*). Come on, you funny girl. (*They go out, ROBERT still holding forth.*)

ROBERT (*following*). This Prince Michael, you know, is probably not of the Royal Family—such as it is. A distant connection, perhaps, but—

[*They are gone.*]

(MRS. FAITHFULL and ANGELA appear in the gallery.)

ANGELA (*as they come downstairs*). Have a cocktail, won't you?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Thank you.

(*She comes down; ANGELA after her, still undressed, still smoking.*)

ANGELA. Help yourself.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*helping herself*). He talks English, of course?

ANGELA. Oh, yes.

MRS. FAITHFULL. That's a comfort. About how old, would you say?

ANGELA. Thirty-five. Forty.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh, as old as that? Good-looking?

ANGELA. All right.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Who else are coming?

ANGELA. Dr. Ainslie.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*disapproving*). Oh!

ANGELA. Jennifer.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*disapproving in a different way*). Ah! . . . There's something about her which would appeal to a foreigner, don't you think?

ANGELA. Why to a foreigner, particularly?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Her figure is a little—foreign, don't you think?

ANGELA (*indifferently*). Is it?

MRS. FAITHFULL. What sort of stays does she wear—if any? In my young days when stays *were* stays, you either had a ridge across the back or you hadn't. Nowadays, there's nothing to tell you whether they wear them or they don't.

ANGELA. We'll ask her at dinner to-night.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Not in front of Imogen, dear, if you don't mind.

ANGELA. Doesn't she know about them?

MRS. FAITHFULL. She's looking sweet to-night, don't you think? I'm sure the Prince will think so. A little English wild rose. And have *you* a pretty dress for us?

ANGELA. Same old blue.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*relieved*). Ah! . . . But it suits you very well, dear.

ANGELA. It's had long enough to get used to me.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Still, if the Prince has never seen it——

BATTERSBY (*off*). Angela!

ANGELA. Hallo!

BATTERSBY. May I wear my old coat and a soft shirt?

ANGELA. Why ever not?

BATTERSBY. Holt will have a white waistcoat, I suppose?

ANGELA (*to* MRS. FAITHFULL). Had he?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh, yes! (*Loudly*) Yes, Mr. Battersby.

BATTERSBY. Oh, is that you, Mrs. Faithfull? Sorry I'm not ready.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*a little primly*). It's quite all right, thank you.

BATTERSBY. Well, then, Angela, if Holt has a white waistcoat, and I have a soft shirt, and Ainslie has an ordinary tail-coat with a stethoscope in it, the Prince is bound to be all right, *whatever* he wears.

ANGELA. The perfect host.

BATTERSBY (*loudly*). What?

ANGELA. Soft shirt, darling.

BATTERSBY. Good! Shan't be a moment, Mrs. Faithfull.

MRS. FAITHFULL. That's all right, thank you. Angela is looking after me. . . . I always think Mr. Battersby looks so artistic in his velvet coat. . . . Of course this is quite an informal visit of Prince Michael's.

ANGELA. Naturally.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Did you see much of him at Monte?

ANGELA. We met him.

MRS. FAITHFULL. And he said, could he come and see you when he was in England?

ANGELA. He did say something about it, I believe.

MRS. FAITHFULL. They often say it, but they don't always come.

ANGELA (*sympathetically*). Don't they?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Well, of course, I don't encourage it for Imogen. Not abroad. You never know Who is Who.

ANGELA. As long as they're amusing——

MRS. FAITHFULL. The amusing ones are never Who. You can depend on that.

ANGELA. Then we're in for a dull evening.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh, a Prince is different. Prince Michael—— (*Very carelessly*) We just call him Prince Michael, I suppose. An informal visit, naturally. I told Imogen, yes—he is sure to be interesting. (*Vaguely*) All Europe just now, I think. New groupings of nationalities. One so rarely hears the real truth. I am told that we are much nearer to another world-war than we think. The Prince must tell us. I suppose Neo-Slavonia is pro-Ally?

ANGELA. Are there any allies now? They're fond of the English, I believe.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh, well, that's a good thing.

(*They are interrupted by JENNIFER.*)

JENNIFER (*at the open door*). French mustard. Don't tell me I ought to have gone to the back door with it.

ANGELA. Oh, thanks. (*She puts the mustard on the table, and calls out.*) Emily!

JENNIFER (*to* MRS. FAITHFULL). Good-evening, dear. What a charming dress! (*To* ANGELA) May I go back and change mine?

MRS. FAITHFULL (*pleased*). We must do what we can when there are so many pretty young ones round us.

JENNIFER (*with a charming, modest laugh*). Oh, how sweet—— (*The laugh stops suddenly. In which group is she included? She says solemnly*) Yes. We must.

ANGELA (*indicating cocktail*). Have one?

JENNIFER. My dear, I daren't.

ANGELA. You *are* absurd.

EMILY (*coming in*). Yes, miss?

ANGELA (*nodding at it*). Mustard.

[EMILY takes it and goes out.

JENNIFER (*resigned*). I suppose I shan't see *that* again.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Angela was just telling me that the Neo-Slavonians are very fond of the English.

JENNIFER. Yes, Gladstone or somebody said something in 1874 which they have never quite forgotten . . . but which I have.

ANGELA. What sort of thing?

JENNIFER. Legitimate aspirations . . . which *although* . . . yet . . . in the not far-distant future—— You know how they talk.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*nodding profoundly*). It is curious to think that if Mr. Gladstone had never said—whatever exactly it was—fifty years ago, Prince Michael mightn't have been dining here to-night.

JENNIFER. And if Mr. Faithfull had never said "I love you" twenty-five years ago, Imogen mightn't have been dining here to-night.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*stiffly*). That doesn't strike me as so curious.

JENNIFER. Still, it is interesting. Angela, darling, if you don't get dressed, nobody will be dining here to-night.

ANGELA. (*lounging off*). I'm just ready. (*She goes up.*) The others are in the garden.

JENNIFER. I saw a pretty pink butterfly on the lawn. I suppose that was Imogen.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*absently*). Yes, we always wear pink in the evening.

JENNIFER (*suddenly*). Isn't it funny that there aren't any pink butterflies? I'd never thought of it before. Reds and yellows and blues and browns and purples, but no pinks. I wonder why?

MRS. FAITHFULL (*who doesn't wonder why*). We shall know one day, I daresay.

JENNIFER. I'd rather know now, because I'm sure to forget later on. There will be so many questions to ask when we get to Heaven. (*Childishly*) What's your first one? I'll tell you what mine is. I shall say, "Now, *what* about all those stars? What were they there for?"

(MRS. FAITHFULL *feels uncomfortably that there is nothing about this in the Church of England Services, and gets back to butterflies.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL. The General must have seen many beautiful butterflies in India.

JENNIFER. He didn't talk about them.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*coming to the point*). What did happen at Monte, do you know?

JENNIFER (*at a loss*). Monty?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Between Angela and the Prince.

JENNIFER. Oh—Monte! I always call it Carlo. . . . Did anything happen?

MRS. FAITHFULL. She evidently made a great impression. Of course nothing could ever— Still, in these

democratic days, I suppose—— She hasn't said anything to *you*?

JENNIFER. She told me not to be vulgar when I hinted that——

MRS. FAITHFULL (*stiffly*). There is a vulgar way and another way, no doubt, of making these enquiries.

JENNIFER (*cheerfully*). Yes, mine was the vulgar way. (*With an air*) But, after all, are we not women? The moment they meet, shall we not know if "soft eyes look love to eyes which speak again"?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh, one always knows, of course.

JENNIFER (*romantically*).

"And she was only seventeen,
Nor child, nor woman, but between—
And oh! the love light in her een!"

But if the light be not there, I shall wish *Imogen* luck, and I don't care how vulgar anybody calls me.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*deprecating, but pleased*). Oh, *Imogen* is only a baby.

JENNIFER. As old as *Angela*.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*firmly*). Not in the sight of Heaven.

JENNIFER (*to herself*). That will be another thing to ask about when I get there. . . . (*To MRS. FAITHFULL*) Of course we must remember that the Prince's prospects are not necessarily confined to *Wych Trentham*. He may decide to marry *out* of the village.

(*DR. AINSLIE is at the door. At 50 he has a sense of humour which the ladies call "so satirical"; and, in his own words, he can "stand anything but shams," by which he means Religion, Royalty and other politenesses much esteemed in Wych Trentham. Some people call him a cynic, without quite knowing what it means, and they all say that "it is a great pity he never married."*)

AINSLIE. Do I come in, or do I go to the front door and get announced in style?

JENNIFER. Which do you generally do?

AINSLIE (*sarcastically*). I don't generally have the honour of meeting a Prince. Good-evening, Mrs. Faithfull.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*coldly*). Good-evening.

AINSLIE. Outwardly calm, but with beating hearts, and murmuring a few French phrases to ourselves, we await the arrival of His Highness.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*to JENNIFER*). Is Imogen outside, dear? I think I'll go to her.

AINSLIE (*making way for her*). She is the one in pink. (MRS. FAITHFULL *goes out haughtily*.) That woman doesn't like me.

JENNIFER (*consolingly*). But the next doctor is a long way off.

AINSLIE. Oh, professionally, I have no anxiety. But she doesn't like me. Do you know why?

JENNIFER. Your diffident manner?

AINSLIE. I told her that she was bringing Imogen up badly.

JENNIFER. Speaking as a doctor, or as a—bachelor?

AINSLIE. As a substitute for the Vicar. (*Indicating the drinks*) Are these for me?

JENNIFER. Some of them. (*He goes to the table, and holds up one*.) No, thank you.

AINSLIE (*drinking*). I said: "You are robbing Imogen of her youth." Look at all the other jolly little girls you see about. They drink, and they smoke, and they swear, and they read improper books, and they're very clever and cynical, and we say, "Bless their dear little hearts! Youth, youth! I was as young as that once." I tell you, Jennifer, it brings tears into my eyes sometimes, to see them so young and so pleased with them-

selves, and to think that they will have to grow up. But Imogen will marry and settle down before she has had any youth at all.

JENNIFER (*smiling*). I fancy that Imogen is deeper than you think. When she is away from her mother—

AINSLIE. Deep! But that's what I'm saying! She's as deep as you or I. She has no business to be deep at her age. Deep! She's probably romantic, and all sorts of nice elderly things like that. I daresay she's told herself stories about this ridiculous Prince of yours. Just as *you* have. (*He drinks and says firmly*) I don't know about anybody else, but I do not propose to call him "Sir."

JENNIFER. "Nobody asked you, Sir, she said. . . . Sir, she said." . . . Sir, *she* said—unlike the doctor of Wych Trentham.

AINSLIE. And I shall talk English.

JENNIFER (*disappointedly*). Oh! . . . Couldn't you say a few words in medical Latin now and then?

AINSLIE. That reminds me. Is there an Established Church in Neo-Slavonia?

JENNIFER. Good gracious, what a question to ask a lone widow woman suddenly!

AINSLIE. It's a new country, so it may still be free from the shackles of ecclesiasticism

JENNIFER. Will this be the general trend of the conversation this evening? Because, if so, I should like to go back for my cigarette cards.

AINSLIE (*warming to it*). No country with an Established Church has any claim to be considered civilised. But the fools won't see it.

JENNIFER (*soothingly*). They never do, do they? I don't believe they try. (*Very soothingly*) Shall I put your glass down for you, or hold your hobby-horse while you dismount?

AINSLIE (*with a laugh*). All right, I'll spare you the rest. (*He pats her hand affectionately.*)

(ANGELA comes down, dressed at last.)

ANGELA. Hallo !

AINSLIE (*shaking hands*). Good-evening. Produce your Prince.

ANGELA. Isn't he here ?

AINSLIE. He's looking for the red carpet. Have you got a red carpet ? I came in through the garden. The village band ought to be playing the Neo-Slavonian National Anthem. Why isn't it ? This party is being run very badly.

(BATTERSBY comes down from his bedroom, as the others return from the garden.)

BATTERSBY. Hallo, Doctor. (*He beckons him on one side.*) I say, we're a cigar short. You'd rather have a pipe, wouldn't you ?

AINSLIE. Even if I wouldn't, I should smoke it to-night, as an assertion of my Republican principles.

BATTERSBY. Excellent. Could you also assert your medical principles, and tell Holt that any one of the four big cigars on the top of the box would undoubtedly be fatal to him ?

AINSLIE. Do I speak as one who knows Holt's constitution, or as one who knows the cigars ?

BATTERSBY. I don't mind which way you put it, as long as you frighten him.

(ANGELA and JENNIFER have been greeting the others.)

AINSLIE now joins them.)

ANGELA. Well, we may as well sit down. I don't know how long he's going to be. (*To MRS. FAITHFULL*) Come along.

(*They sit on the sofa together. ETHEL and IMOGEN, assisted by the men, find seats. JENNIFER*

*stands by the open door, where she is joined by
BATTERSBY.)*

MRS. FAITHFULL. He's driving over, I suppose.

ANGELA. I suppose so.

(There is an awkward silence.)

ETHEL *(breaking it)*. One, two, three. . . . I was just counting, making sure we weren't going to be thirteen.

AINSLIE. Why? *(To ANGELA)* Have you got only twelve plates?

ETHEL. I don't care what you say, Dr. Ainslie, there *is* something in it.

AINSLIE. Folly.

ROBERT *(seriously)*. I've known some funny things happen, Ainslie. In the war.

AINSLIE. Even in a war nothing would happen which could be so funny as the superstitious man's Theory of the Universe. Particularly if he also professed to be a religious man.

ANGELA. Well, nothing funny is going to happen to-night, because we're only ten.

MRS. FAITHFULL *(looking round the room)*. Ten?

ANGELA. There's a sort of secretary person coming with him. Name of Oliver.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh! Hasn't he any other name?

ANGELA. James.

MRS. FAITHFULL *(at a loss)*. Oh!

AINSLIE. J. Oliver or O. James? Or doesn't he mind?

ANGELA. J. Oliver. He's driving him over, much to the disappointment of the cook, who hoped for a real chauffeur.

AINSLIE. With the latest royal scandal to communicate.

(There is another awkward silence.)

ETHEL *(breaking it)*. Mr. Oliver's a soldier, I suppose. *(To ROBERT)* I wonder if you'll know him.

ROBERT. There was an Oliver in the Middlesex Regiment—Second Battalion.

(Another silence. But ETHEL is determined to make the party go.)

ETHEL. Was he nice?

ROBERT. Oh, all right. I hardly knew him

(Silence.)

ETHEL *(trying again)*. I wonder if that's the one.

ROBERT. Hardly likely, I should think.

(Silence.)

ETHEL *(a last effort)*. Oh, I don't know, he might be.

(The conversation, which never promised much, has now abandoned hope. There is another long silence.)

MRS. FAITHFULL

ROBERT

(simultaneously). { I wonder if there's
any chance—
You don't know if
he plays—

ROBERT

MRS. FAITHFULL

(simultaneously). { I beg your pardon.

(Each waits for the other.)

ROBERT. Please!

MRS. FAITHFULL. I was only wondering how long he was to be in the neighbourhood. Did he say anything about that?

ANGELA. No.

AINSLIE. It depends how charming we are to-night.

(Everybody waits for ROBERT.)

ETHEL *(after a pause)*. What were you going to say, dear?

ROBERT. Nothing. I wondered if we might rope him in for the match on Saturday.

ETHEL. He wouldn't play cricket, would he? It's such an English game, isn't it?

ROBERT. I just wondered. He was at an English school, wasn't he?

ANGELA. I think so.

ETHEL. Oh ! I didn't know. That makes a difference, doesn't it ?

(Another silence.)

BATTERSBY *(from the window, where he has been talking to JENNIFER)*. I don't believe he's coming, dear.

ANGELA *(calmly)*. Then he'll miss a very good dinner.

AINSLIE. Good !

MRS. FAITHFULL *(the authority)*. Naturally Royalty must arrive last.

ETHEL. I suppose so. *(To ROBERT)* Oh, I meant to ask you, Robert, what happened when that German Prince dined in your Mess ? *(Hurriedly to the others)* Before the war, of course.

JENNIFER *(at the door)*. S'sh.

(She takes a step into the garden. They all listen.)

MRS. FAITHFULL. I think I hear his car.

JENNIFER *(looking in)*. He comes !

(She disappears, but they are not noticing her. All, save ANGELA, have become self-conscious. There is a strained silence. They feel at their clothes to make sure they are all right. MRS. FAITHFULL touches up IMOGEN. ANGELA, at ease, is still smoking.)

EMILY *(announcing)*. Prince Michael Robolski, Mr. Oliver.

(They come in. The PRINCE is a man of 40, with an upturned moustache, pleasant-looking, active in body and mind. He speaks with a very slight foreign accent, and wears a coloured ribbon in the lapel of his coat. OLIVER is a very young Englishman, smooth, round-faced, and rather obviously new to his job.)

ANGELA *(getting up gracefully)*. Hallo ! Nice to see you again.

PRINCE (*bending over her hand*). Mademoiselle! But this is delightful! May I present my good friend who takes care of me, Mr. Oliver?

ANGELA (*to OLIVER*). How do you do? (*They shake hands.*)

BATTERSBY (*coming forward*). Very glad to see you again, Prince Michael.

PRINCE (*shaking hands with him*). But how kind of you to have me in your house.

BATTERSBY (*hand out to OLIVER*). How do you do? Find the way all right?

OLIVER. Oh yes, rather, thank you, sir.

ANGELA (*to the PRINCE*). Now then, come along. . . . This is Mrs. Faithfull.

PRINCE (*holding out his hand*). Madame!

MRS. FAITHFULL (*curtseying*). How do you do?

ANGELA. And Miss Faithfull.

MRS. FAITHFULL. May I present my little girl, Imogen, to Your Highness?

PRINCE (*holding out his hand, and smiling*). How do you do, Miss Imogen?

(*IMOGEN nearly swoons.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL. Imogen, dear! I am afraid, Prince Michael, that my little girl is rather shy.

PRINCE (*charmingly*). But we are all friends here, are we not?

(*He takes her hand.*)

IMOGEN (*in a faint whisper*). How do you do?

(*MRS. FAITHFULL administers first aid.*)

ANGELA. Dr. Ainslie.

PRINCE (*smiling*). The Champion of the Established Church?

ANGELA. He's a Republican, really.

AINSLIE. Angela has been telling tales out of school.

PRINCE (*holding out his hand*). Still we shake hands, do we not?

AINSLIE (*shaking it, and smiling*). Without prejudice.

PRINCE. Oh, but perfectly. (*To ANGELA*) You see, I remember what you tell me. (*He comes to the HOLTS.*) And this would be—you tell me of them—— The soldier with the pretty wife—— (*To ETHEL*) Pardon, madame, but she did say so. And now I see for myself.

ANGELA. Captain and Mrs. Holt.

PRINCE. Holt! But of course.

(*They shake hands.*)

ETHEL (*blushing*). How do you do?

ROBERT (*bravely, like a soldier*). How do you do, sir?

(*OLIVER has been following with BATTERSBY.*)

ANGELA. But where's Jennifer?

(*They all look round in bewilderment.*)

PRINCE. That would be Madame Boolager, the General's widow. . . . And that's all Princes are good for in these times, is it not so, Doctor? Remembering.

ANGELA. Well, come and have a drink.

PRINCE. Mademoiselle thinks of everything. (*He takes a cocktail, and looks round the room.*) So this is where my friends the Battersbys live?

ANGELA. You like it?

PRINCE. How can I not like it? It is yourselves. I bow to the flowers as I come through the garden: "Miss Angela, we meet again." I shake hands with the front door, and say, "Battersby, how well you are looking." (*Indicating the gallery*) Mademoiselle stands up there sometimes. (*ANGELA nods.*) And looks down on the little children playing below. I can see her. (*Raising his glass to the room*) I drink to you. (*He drinks.*) And Mademoiselle is here also. (*To his cocktail*) How do you do, Miss Angela? (*He picks up a second glass.*) But you must drink too.

EMILY (*announcing*). Mrs. Bulger !

(JENNIFER *sweeps superbly in.*)

JENNIFER (*to ANGELA, who comes to meet her*). Darling, I'm so sorry I'm late. Do forgive me ! (*She kisses her.*)

ANGELA (*smiling and releasing herself*). Come along. Prince Michael, this is my friend, Jennifer.

(JENNIFER'S *smile changes suddenly into an expression of amazement. She stares at the PRINCE, who smiles pleasantly back at her. Then with an effort she gains control of herself.*)

JENNIFER (*slowly*). How do you do, Prince Michael ?

PRINCE (*with a friendly smile*). How do you do ? (*He has a glass in each hand, and he looks whimsically from one to the other of them.*) You will forgive me ?

JENNIFER (*with a sudden laugh*). I think I'll have one too.

(*He gives her one. They drink, their eyes on each other.*)

EMILY. Dinner is served.

ACT II

The women have had their coffee in the dining-room, and now—10.30 nearly—they are all coming back together, talking as they come.

PRINCE. I assure you, Miss Battersby, that absence of ceremony is what most I like. I should have been desolated if you had deserted us.

AINSLIE. You get enough ceremonial, I expect.

PRINCE. Those wearisome Court dinners! (*He shudders.*) So long as the women are there—charming!

JENNIFER. Whoever the women are?

(They gradually find themselves seats, instinctively grouping themselves round the PRINCE.)

PRINCE. Whoever the women are. But when they leave us——!

BATTERSBY. Stuffy political talk, eh?

PRINCE (*nodding*). So wearisome.

ANGELA. I can't stand politics at any price.

PRINCE. Nor I. When the women are there, we talk of many things. But when the men are left alone with their wine and their cigars, and one of our great statesmen move his chair next to mine, and in a low voice begin to tell me of the little dancer he has discovered—(*he makes a gesture of boredom*)—no; I, too, cannot stand politics.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*hastily*). Yes, I suppose dancing is as much a national pastime with you as with the Russians.

PRINCE. As with all nations.

JENNIFER. I feel that I want to ask Prince Michael a great deal about his country. (*She looks meaningly at him.*) And about himself.

PRINCE (*returning her look*). I am at your service, madame.

JENNIFER. Suppose we begin like the geography books. Chief industries. Exports and imports.

ETHEL (*brightly*). They always asked that, didn't they?

PRINCE. Since the Peace Conference our chief industry has been fighting.

ROBERT (*nodding professionally*). Ah! Quite so, sir.

PRINCE. A European War is an impossibility just now. The big countries dislike each other so much that there are no Allies, and without Allies, how can you have a really good war? So we little countries—how do you say?—keep the pot boiling. Our season opens in March. If we declare war first, we export soldiers. If the enemy declares war first, we import them. At the close of the season, in October, we export journalists, and import Boundary Commissioners.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Most interesting. Your literature, of course, we are all getting to know.

PRINCE (*pleased*). Indeed? Our famous poet-dramatist, Tushkin—you read him?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Naturally.

(*There is a general murmur of assent.*)

PRINCE (*looking at them admiringly*). So you all know him? Excellent.

BATTERSBY. Is he popular in your country?

PRINCE. He is considered highly immoral.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*unhappily*). Oh! I should hardly—

AINSLIE. In this country immoral plays are only allowed on Sundays.

PRINCE. Oh? In that case Tushkin would certainly be limited to Easter Sunday.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*hastily*). Really, really, really! (*To IMOGEN*) What is it, dear? Yes. . . . Yes, I'm sure you could. My little girl wants to ask you, Prince Michael—is that a Neo-Slavonian order which you are wearing?

PRINCE. But certainly. Our Order of the Leopard. First Class.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh yes, of course.

ROBERT. A military order, sir?

PRINCE. A general order—according to the class, you understand. There are seven classes altogether.

ETHEL. Oh yes!

PRINCE. The First Class for members of the blood royal; however distinguished, or, as in my case, undistinguished. (*Murmurs of dissent.*) I thank you! The Second Class for distinguished statesmen, diplomats and so forth. The Third Class for those eminent in war. Our famous Generals.

ROBERT. And Admirals. Quite so, sir.

PRINCE. It is, I assure you, not so much lack of gallantry as lack of a coast-line which prevents us from having equally famous Admirals.

ROBERT (*red*). Of course. I was forgetting.

PRINCE. The Fourth Class is for our Bankers, our Financial Geniuses, our great employers of Labour. Your Mr. Harrod would be a Leopard of the Fourth Class. Our Fifth Class for the professional men who have achieved eminence—lawyers, doctors and the like. And the Sixth Class for the men of science. *Voilà!*

MRS. FAITHFULL. But you said seven classes, Prince Michael.

PRINCE (*carelessly*). Oh, the Seventh Class is just for writers, painters and composers. I had forgotten them.

MRS. FAITHFULL. Oh, yes !

IMOGEN (*nervously*). Ma—may——

MRS. FAITHFULL. S'sh, dear !

PRINCE. You were saying, Miss Imogen ?

MRS. FAITHFULL. How kind of you, Prince Michael !
You wanted to ask the Prince, dear ?

IMOGEN (*with a rush*). Wh—which is the top class ?

MRS. FAITHFULL (*pained*). Really !

PRINCE. The artists last, as in England. We are
great admirers of the English.

AINSLIE. You don't follow us in having an Established
Church, I hope ?

PRINCE (*laughing*). Ah, that Established Church !
(*They all laugh.*)

JENNIFER (*suddenly*). He shan't be laughed at ! . . .
Well, Prince Michael ?

PRINCE. In Neo-Slavonia we have what you would call
a " good form " church, just as you have here, but it has
no authority—except, no doubt, with Heaven.

AINSLIE. Good !

JENNIFER. So you are great admirers of the English,
Prince Michael ?

PRINCE. Who is not ?

BATTERSBY. A good many, I'm afraid.

PRINCE. That air of—how shall I describe it ?

ROBERT (*coughing*). I am an Englishman—take it or
leave it.

PRINCE. Excellent, excellent !

ETHEL (*reproachfully*). Robert !

PRINCE. That is how England goes about the world.
No wonder she is loved. And America, she says, " I
am an American—gee ! isn't that great ? " And
France, the most insular country in the world, France
says, " *Moi, je suis français—pardon !* "

JENNIFER. And the Neo-Slavonian ?

PRINCE. He says, "I talk about myself too much."
(*He makes a movement as if to get up.*)

ANGELA (*getting up*). Let's go into the garden, shall we? (*To PRINCE*) Or would you rather play Bridge?

PRINCE. I can play Bridge anywhere. (*Looking at JENNIFER*) Only here can I talk to your friends. (*He looks at ANGELA, who smiles and understands.*)

ANGELA (*to MRS. FAITHFULL*). Come along, then.

(*They lead the way.*)

ETHEL (*to IMOGEN*). Are you coming, dear?

(*They go out together. The men wait for JENNIFER.*)

JENNIFER. Don't wait for me. I have a shawl upstairs. (*She moves slowly as if to get it.*)

BATTERSBY. Right.

PRINCE. May I not wait, madame?

JENNIFER. But how kind of you, Prince Michael!

BATTERSBY. That's right, Prince Michael. Bring her along. (*He shepherds the others out.*)

(*JENNIFER, three stairs up, and the PRINCE, in the middle of the room, stand waiting until the others can no longer be heard.*)

PRINCE (*moving towards it*). Shall I close the door?

JENNIFER (*mockingly*). As Your Highness pleases.

(*He smiles, and comes back.*)

(*JENNIFER comes down the stairs, and stands two or three yards away, looking at him.*)

JENNIFER. Well, Michael?

PRINCE (*smiling*). Well, Jennifer? (*He has no foreign accent now.*)

JENNIFER. So you've come back to me at last.

PRINCE. Yes.

JENNIFER. Four years, isn't it?

PRINCE. About that.

JENNIFER. You're getting on in the world.

PRINCE. Aren't I?

JENNIFER. Fancy ! A real Prince !

PRINCE. But of a very small country.

JENNIFER. When I last saw you, you were plain Michael Brown of Hammersmith.

PRINCE (*nodding*). Yes. And you were beautiful Mrs. Michael Brown of West Kensington.

JENNIFER (*laughing*). Oh, Michael, what am I going to do about you ? . . . May I sit down, Your Highness ?

PRINCE (*arranging a chair for her*). The wife always takes the husband's rank and precedence. Your chair, Princess.

JENNIFER (*sitting down*). I thought perhaps ours was a morganatic marriage.

PRINCE. There are no morganatic marriages in Neo-Slavonia.

JENNIFER. Ah, now tell me. I've been longing to ask you all the evening—only it sounded so absurd. *Is* there such a country as Neo-Slavonia ?

PRINCE (*shocked*). Good heavens, no ! You don't suggest that I'm a common impostor, do you ?

JENNIFER. I wondered. Aren't you ?

PRINCE (*with dignity*). Certainly not.

JENNIFER. I'm glad.

PRINCE. Besides, where would be the fun ? I'm an inventor

JENNIFER. I see.

PRINCE. I invented the small buffer-state of Neo-Slavonia. I invented all of it. Its name, its people, its customs, its orders and its literature. I then gave myself the title of Prince in that country. Who but I had the right to bestow that title ? Whom more worthy of it than myself could I find ?

JENNIFER (*nodding*). Prince Michael Robulski.

MICHAEL. Robolski. In Neo-Slavonia the termination “-ulski” is now obsolete.

JENNIFER. I must try to remember.

PRINCE. It's a jolly little country. You must let me show it to you one day.

JENNIFER. Thank you. But would it be quite proper for us to go about together?

PRINCE. Proper?

JENNIFER. The late General James Bulger—C.B.—was very old-fashioned. I don't think he would like his widow— How do they regard these things in your country?

PRINCE. Ah, now tell me. I have been longing to ask you all the evening—only it sounded so absurd. Was there ever a General James Bulger—C.B.?

JENNIFER (*shocked*). Good heavens, no! You don't suggest that I'm a common bigamist, do you?

PRINCE. I wondered. Aren't you?

JENNIFER (*with dignity*). Certainly not.

PRINCE. I'm glad.

JENNIFER. Besides, where would be the fun? I'm an inventor.

PRINCE. I see.

JENNIFER. I invented a big, red-faced soldier called Bulger. I invented all of him. I invented his rank and his orders, and his medals. I then married him. Who but I had any right to consider myself his wife?

PRINCE. True. You know, I had an uneasy feeling—

JENNIFER. That I had married *again*?

PRINCE. Well, you might have thought I was dead.

JENNIFER (*sweetly*). Even that mightn't make me want a *second* husband.

PRINCE (*acknowledging the hit*). I suppose not. Then why drag in Bulger?

JENNIFER (*after a little silence*). Michael!

PRINCE. Yes?

JENNIFER. Did you ever wonder what had happened to me after you left me so suddenly ?

PRINCE. Often.

JENNIFER. You remembered that you *had* got a wife somewhere ?

PRINCE. Of course. . . . Did you ever wonder what had happened to *me* ?

JENNIFER (*carelessly*). Sometimes.

PRINCE. You had your own money, so I knew you wouldn't starve.

JENNIFER (*nodding*). And eating is the great thing in life, isn't it ?

PRINCE (*lightly*). I've thought so once or twice in the last four years.

JENNIFER (*thoughtfully*). I don't know how it is, but if people ask after your husband, and you say, "Oh, he left me a year or two ago ; I don't know why ; we were rather on edge after the war, and he couldn't find a job, and I suppose he suddenly got sick of me," it never sounds—— I don't know how it is, but it never—— Well, you know, Michael, I thought I could think of something more respectable than that. So when I came down here, where nobody knew me, I announced that my husband had left me for the only reason which a loving, dutiful, high-minded husband, such as yourself, could have for leaving a loving, dutiful, delightful wife—— such as me. He had died.

PRINCE (*nodding*). And by the terms of the will which he made on his death-bed, had changed his name to Bulger.

JENNIFER (*smiling*). Well——*that*—— ! You see, I wanted him to be a soldier.

PRINCE. Good Heavens, hadn't you had enough of soldiers ? Wasn't I one for four years, if it comes to that ?

JENNIFER. Oh, my dear, not one of those rough, amateur, *fighting* soldiers! A real peace-time soldier! All clean, and in a nice red coat, and covered with medals! A professional soldier!

PRINCE. The sort to whom we give the Order of the Leopard, Third Class, in Neo-Slavonia?

JENNIFER. Exactly! A soldier. A General. A C.B. It's very respectable to be a General's widow.

PRINCE. But you can be a General without being called James Bulger. In Neo-Slavonia—I beg your pardon, I keep forgetting. But I'm sure that you can be a General without being called James Bulger.

JENNIFER (*eagerly*). Not as I saw him. Not this one. General James Bulger, C.B. Can't *you* see him?

PRINCE (*nodding*). I can hear him.

JENNIFER. You don't know what a comfort the thought of him has been. In many a difficulty I have asked myself, "Now, what would the General have said?"—and then I've remembered, "Not in front of the Vicar."

PRINCE. A fine soldier. One of the old breed. My only objection to him is that he had no business to go handing his name about like that.

JENNIFER. But the name has been a great comfort too. (*Shyly*) You may have noticed that I have become a little—a little—— Or have I not?

PRINCE (*emphatically*). Not a day!

JENNIFER. I wasn't referring to days so much.

PRINCE (*emphatically*). Not an inch!

JENNIFER (*excitedly*). Really? Michael! How Neo-Slavonia has improved you! But to English eyes there does seem to be a—— a tendency—— Well, the name has been a great help. Because when people are told, "I want you to come and meet my dear friend Mrs. Bulger," they come expecting the worst, and when they

see me, they say—(*imitating them*)—"Oh, but how—I didn't—I had no idea!"—and any little—tendency—becomes an added charm, as though, in my kindly way, I were humouring the name. . . . Do you understand?

PRINCE. Perfectly.

JENNIFER. And another advantage of it is that it makes them all call me Jennifer so quickly. I like that. I'm a friendly soul.

PRINCE. The men too?

JENNIFER (*sweetly*). Why not?

PRINCE. I am thinking of the General. You remember how old-fashioned he was. I don't think *he* would have liked it.

JENNIFER. Why, his last words were, "Jennifer, Jennifer!"

PRINCE. One doesn't want one's last words broadcast. What did he die of, by the way?

JENNIFER. One of those Indian frontier skirmishes.

PRINCE. What was a real General doing, getting mixed up dangerously in one of those?

JENNIFER. It wasn't in the danger-zone. At least, not officially. (*In a whisper, after a glance to see that they are alone*) A soda-water bottle burst just as he was opening it. (*In her natural voice*) I always call it "a stray bullet."

PRINCE (*smiling*). You've been taking a risk, haven't you? Who's that heavy fellow who's here to-night—

JENNIFER. Captain Holt?

PRINCE. He must have been in India. He might make inquiries—I daresay he reads back numbers of the Army List on Sunday afternoons.

JENNIFER. Well, but it was all settled before he came. Anyway, I don't see why he should doubt me. He hasn't got a suspicious nature like yours.

PRINCE. If you had consulted *me*, I should have recommended a nice quiet death near Woking.

JENNIFER (*shaking her head*). No. That wouldn't have done. You see, at first—just at first—I didn't want—You see, I thought my husband might come back to me. So I didn't want to be too definite about his death. I wanted to leave a loophole of explanation. He had been left for dead, captured by the advancing enemy, escaped, lost his memory, perhaps. . . . So that if he *had* turned up one day—— (*She pauses.*)

PRINCE. Yes?

JENNIFER (*gaily*). Then I shouldn't have seemed quite such an impostor.

PRINCE. Inventor.

JENNIFER (*agreeing*). Inventor.

PRINCE (*after a pause*). And now, after four years, he *has* come back?

JENNIFER (*surprised*). Who?

PRINCE. Your husband.

JENNIFER. Good gracious, no! Prince Michael Rob—— No, don't tell me. That's the obsolete one—Prince Michael Robolski of Neo-Slavonia, wishing to renew his acquaintance and—(*smiling sweetly*)—shall I say “further his suit”?—with the charming Miss Angela Battersby, is paying a short, a *very* short visit, to Wych Trentham.

PRINCE. I don't see why *very* short.

JENNIFER. Well, you see, my dear Prince, at any moment I may discover the exact position on the map of Neo-Slavonia.

PRINCE. Yes, but why this passion for accurate geography suddenly?

JENNIFER. Because I am fond of Angela Battersby. And I won't let you make a fool of her.

PRINCE. Ah, now I do see your point. But I think

that, however short my visit, I should feel it my duty—the Neo-Slavonians are notoriously a polite race—to say good-bye to—Captain Holt.

JENNIFER (*thoughtfully*). Oh!

PRINCE. I have taken a sudden liking to the studious Captain. I can't let you make a fool of him.

JENNIFER (*smiling*). Yes, I see your point too. . . . I'm afraid, Michael, we're both impostors.

PRINCE. Not impostors : inventors, creators. I wish you would see the difference. We have given an idea to the world. At least I have. To the people I meet, Neo-Slavonia is now as much a real country as Jugo-Slavia or Lithuania. Well, that's *my* doing.

JENNIFER. I see. And when did the great idea come to you?

PRINCE (*smiling reflectively*). It was forced on me. Really it wasn't my fault. . . . It was at Monte Carlo.

JENNIFER (*interested*). Where you were looking for work?

PRINCE. I'd given up looking for work. I'd had enough of that in England after the war. I was looking for money. Much more fun.

JENNIFER. I've been told that there's quite a lot in Monte Carlo. Any luck?

PRINCE. Fairish. . . . Well, you know what the South of France is like. Stiff with potty Royalties from God knows where. (*With a sudden laugh*) I say, it *is* funny to be talking English again; I mean the real English that the English talk. . . . Well, I was lunching with some people I'd never met before, as you do out there, and rather a stupid girl, trying to make conversation, and feeling around for my name, asked me what I did. I said I didn't do anything; and she said, "I suppose you're a Prince." And I said, "Yes, yes"—just as you'd say, "Yes, yes," if anybody asked you in

the Temple if you were a barrister, and you weren't really listening.

JENNIFER. That wasn't Angela?

PRINCE. Oh no, Miss Battersby was much later, when I was generally accepted as a Prince. It was surprising how quickly I was committed to it. (*Proudly*) Of course, as soon as I saw how things were going, I insisted on the Neo-Slavonia. I wasn't going to be an ordinary impostor.

JENNIFER. And did nobody know that there wasn't such a place?

PRINCE. Nobody. You see, I looked at it this way. At the Peace Conference there was nothing to prevent the Big Four creating a new buffer-state called Neo-Slavonia. Was there?

JENNIFER. No.

PRINCE. Well, now, if they *had* created it, it was certain that one or two of them wouldn't have known where it was.

JENNIFER. Absolutely.

PRINCE. So I thought, "If they wouldn't know, I don't see why anybody else should want to." You see what I mean?

JENNIFER. Perfectly.

PRINCE. Of course, I worked up the local colour gradually. At one time it was a very near thing whether it had a sea-coast or not; but I felt it was rather dangerous. What do you think?

JENNIFER (*gravely*). Oh yes, I think a sea-coast would have been rather dangerous.

PRINCE. Of course, we have a certain amount of local water-borne traffic on the—the Danube. I fancy it's the Danube.

JENNIFER. Oh, Michael, you ought to know that!

PRINCE. I find it easier to remember when I am using

a slight Neo-Slavonian accent. Plain Michael Brown was never much good at geography.

JENNIFER. Nor so popular, I suppose.

PRINCE. Oh, no. You get a very good time as a Prince. There's a lot of hospitality going about.

JENNIFER. And a lot of credulity, too.

PRINCE (*smiling*). Yes, fellow-inventor, there is. . . . If you say anything dogmatically enough, the other man is always a little doubtful of himself. . . . You'd be surprised how many literary authorities—critics and such like—have agreed with me in thinking that Tushkin should have been given the Nobel prize instead of his more popular fellow-countryman, Gregorovitch. I'll lay a thousand to eight that there's not one person in the world who could give you a complete list of the Nobel prize-winners. My own theory is that every other year they invent the name and stick to the money.

JENNIFER (*shaking her head at him*). Oh, Michael! And did none of that hospitality lodge in your throat?

PRINCE. My dear Jennifer, why should it? If I got fifteen shillings worth of food and drink, didn't I give fifteen shillings worth of entertainment in return for it? Ask your friends which they prefer: a dinner where they'll meet a fifteen-shilling Prince, or a dinner where they'll have to listen to a hundred-guinea violinist. They'd vote for me every time. The professional Prince.

JENNIFER. And that's how you've been living lately?

PRINCE. Well, I've had tips, you know.

JENNIFER (*interested*). Ten-franc notes under the napkin?

PRINCE. Not quite so crude as that. Tips about stocks and horses.

JENNIFER. Oh, I see.

PRINCE. If you are high enough up, and supposed not

to want it, you can always get plenty of help in making money. I've done pretty well this last year. In fact, almost well enough to be able to afford to look for work again.

JENNIFER. Then, on the whole, we needn't have been too anxious about each other?

PRINCE. We needn't. You've had your income to yourself, and lived beautifully in the country; and I've had my freedom, and lived——

JENNIFER. Like a Prince——

PRINCE. Like a man, anyway, in the open world. And the bickerings of Hammersmith are gone for ever.

JENNIFER (*after a pause*). And now what?

PRINCE. Well, what?

JENNIFER. Is it Your Highness's pleasure to come back to me?

PRINCE. Good heavens, no!

(JENNIFER *looks surprised*.)

JENNIFER. Oh! . . . I just wanted to know.

PRINCE (*smiling*). I can only come back if General Bulger's widow invites me.

JENNIFER (*laughing*). My dear Michael! if I invite you! Oh, my dear Michael! (*She is laughing again*.)

PRINCE (*undisturbed*). You laugh as adorably as ever.

JENNIFER. Bless the man, now he's going to make love to me!

PRINCE. To a Neo-Slavonian what more delightful way of spending an evening?

JENNIFER. Well, I'd sooner you did it to me than to Angela. I won't have any of that, I warn you, Michael.

PRINCE (*shaking a finger at her*). Oh, Mrs. Bulger, Mrs. Bulger, think of your flirtations at—Simla, was it?

JENNIFER. You come to England at the risk of being exposed as an impostor——

PRINCE. An inventor.

JENNIFER. —just so as to get another glimpse of her. Was that necessary? I say again, I am fond of Angela.

PRINCE. And she is fond of Jennifer.

JENNIFER. In her non-committal way, I think so.

PRINCE (*becoming very foreign suddenly*). Ah, this angel, this Angela! She is not so non-committal away from your English fogs. She expand! She talk! . . . She speak to me of her friends. She speak much of her great friend, Jennifer. Jennifer? I say. Jennifer? What a beautiful name! Tell me of this lady with the so beautiful name! She tell me. It is Madame Boulager. Boulager—one of your great English families. I am intrigued. I am—how do you say it?—agog. Tell me of this Madame Boulager, I say. Your Angela tell me. But it is not until she say one thing that I know for certain who Madame Boulager is.

JENNIFER (*clapping her hands eagerly*). Go on, what did she say about me?

PRINCE. She said, "Jennifer goes about as if she is singing to herself, 'Isn't it fun being Jennifer?'" Then I knew. And I said suddenly, but in our Neo-Slavonian tongue, so that I didn't give myself away—(*he appears to be clearing his throat and sneezing simultaneously*)—which means, "By Jove! It's my Jenny!"

JENNIFER (*carried away*). Oh, Michael! And was it? I mean—go on.

PRINCE. That's all. I came, I saw, I was re-conquered. (*Holding out his hand*) How do you do, Mrs. Brown?

(*You could see that JENNIFER was a little touched by this recital, but the prodigal is not going to be welcomed home so quickly as he thinks. He may have been a Prince in Monte Carlo, but he is not going to have his own way so easily in England.*)

JENNIFER (*drawing her hand away*). Michael, I don't

know what to think about you—but I think you had better go back to Neo-Slavonia . . . or where you will.

PRINCE. Must I?

JENNIFER. Well, obviously you can't stay here.

PRINCE. Why not?

JENNIFER. What as? Prince Michael? My first husband? My future husband? Ridiculous. It's much too difficult.

PRINCE (*eagerly*). Never mind the difficulties. I can manage that all right. That's where the fun comes in. If you want me to stay, I stay.

JENNIFER (*laughing at his assurance*). If I want you to! Why should I want you to?

(*No Prince could stand that laughter from a woman.*)

PRINCE (*quickly*). If I decide to stay, I stay.

JENNIFER (*sparkling*). Is that a threat?

PRINCE. A statement.

JENNIFER (*dangerously*). Take care, Michael.

PRINCE (*equally dangerously*). Take care, Jennifer.

JENNIFER. If you challenge me, I take it up.

PRINCE. Shall I give you the same warning? (*With a sudden smile*) Or shall I just say, "What do you want me to do?"

JENNIFER. Whatever you please, except stay here, where you will do nobody any good.

PRINCE. And if I disobey?

JENNIFER. Then, very reluctantly, I shall explain to my friends the exact position on the map of Europe of Neo-Slavonia.

PRINCE. And the exact position on the map of Asia of General Bulger's body?

JENNIFER. If necessary. (*She smiles sweetly at him.*) My friends will not be hard on me when they hear that my husband was a scamp of whose name and identity I did not wish to be reminded.

PRINCE (*approvingly*). Yes, that's a good card to play. Well done, Jennifer. (*Smiling*) But I also—I play cards.

JENNIFER. Play them in Monte Carlo. It's safer.

PRINCE. You are afraid that I have too many hearts in my hand?

JENNIFER (*laughing, but a little nervously*). Not mine, my dear Michael.

PRINCE (*nodding*). Not the Queen. Well, we shall see. Your orders are that I go back to London to-morrow—and then, if I please, to the devil.

JENNIFER (*quickly*). No, no, Michael, I didn't say that.

PRINCE. On my way to London to-morrow, is it permitted that I look in here just to say good-bye to my hostess?

JENNIFER. You can say good-bye to-night.

PRINCE. In Neo-Slavonia—— (JENNIFER *laughs, and he waits for her to finish.*)

JENNIFER. I beg your pardon.

PRINCE (*unperturbed*). In Neo-Slavonia we have a custom that, on the morning after hospitality, one pays a formal visit to one's hostess in order to render thanks. Is it permitted?

JENNIFER (*reluctantly*). Well, if you must. You can have till twelve to-morrow. After that, if you are still here——

PRINCE (*boyishly*). Say "Noon to-morrow." It sounds more thrilling, and it avoids misapprehension.

JENNIFER (*laughing*). Noon, then. . . . But I mean it.

PRINCE (*nodding*). I shall be ready for you. (*Carelessly*) I have till noon, then. . . . If I don't see you again alone—good-bye, Jennifer.

JENNIFER (*half tender, half amused, wondering what he is up to*). Good-bye, Michael. (*She holds out her hand, but he is not looking.*)

PRINCE. Just do something for me, will you?

JENNIFER (*eagerly*). Yes?

PRINCE (*casually*). Tell young Oliver—he's outside somewhere—that I want him. He will have to see about the car—and I shall have other arrangements to make. Good-bye.

JENNIFER (*after waiting a moment for some sign from him*). Good-bye. [She goes out.]

(*Left alone, the PRINCE looks at his watch. Then he lights a cigarette and walks up and down thinking. OLIVER comes in.*)

OLIVER. You wanted me, sir?

(*The PRINCE nods, and looks at him for a little without speaking.*)

PRINCE. The time has come for us to part, Oliver.

OLIVER (*anxiously*). Aren't you satisfied with me, sir?

PRINCE. Entirely satisfied. You write my letters, you drive my car, you order my breakfast, and all the time you look—how do you say it?—as innocent as a baby. But it was a temporary engagement, was it not?

OLIVER. Yes, sir. I quite understood that. But there is another three weeks to go.

PRINCE. I engage you for the month, I give you the month's salary. It is enough. Now I ask you to do one little thing more for me—and then my orders are that you go back to your Cornwall, is it, and have three weeks holiday. Is that understood?

OLIVER. Yes, sir. It's very kind of you.

PRINCE. This is the last thing. I want you to go now, quietly—can you get your hat and coat without seeing anybody?—

OLIVER. I expect so, sir.

PRINCE. I will say your adieux for you. Go very quietly, take the car, drive back to—what is it?

OLIVER. Medenham.

PRINCE. To the hotel, yes. Stay the night there yourself—pay my bill in the morning—how much?—and then go off to Cornwall.

OLIVER (*reckoning it on his fingers*). Four pound ten, sir, would see it easily.

PRINCE (*giving him a note*). Give the change to anybody you like. That is all. . . . You understand?

OLIVER. Yes, sir. Are you staying here, sir?

PRINCE (*smiling*). That we shall see. (*Holding out his hand*) Good-bye.

OLIVER (*shaking it*). Good-bye, sir. (*Ankwardly*) I'm sorry that you—— If ever another time you should want—— I mean, I owe you three weeks——

PRINCE (*hurrying him out*). I will remember.

OLIVER. I'm afraid I feel rather a fraud, sir.

PRINCE (*with a last push*). I, too, Oliver. . . . Good luck to you.

(*OLIVER goes. And only just in time, for ANGELA comes in from the garden.*)

ANGELA. Well?

PRINCE. Miss Battersby, I could kiss your hand for the delightful evening I have had, were it not that——

ANGELA (*amused*). What?

PRINCE. That I would rather shake it in your English way.

ANGELA (*holding out her hand*). Just as you like.

PRINCE (*pressing it*). I thank you. She is adorable.

ANGELA. Jennifer? I knew you'd like her.

PRINCE (*romantically*). I love her.

ANGELA (*carelessly*). I did tell you she was a widow?

PRINCE. The widow of a gallant General in your army. She tell me herself.

ANGELA. She has a little money of her own.

PRINCE (*promptly*). Five hundred a year. She tell me her—— (*Hastily*) I mean, I guess it.

ANGELA. About that, I suppose. I can't do it into—marks, is it, in your country?

PRINCE (*smiling*). Mademoiselle, I perceive that you are a match-maker. But it would not be necessary to do it into marks. Did I marry, I should not go back to Neo-Slavonia.

ANGELA. If Jennifer married, she wouldn't leave Wych Trentham. She's much too fond of it.

PRINCE (*a little taken aback*). Oh! . . . And all your other friends, they are not likely to be leaving it?

ANGELA. Why should they?

PRINCE. There will be a match-maker one day for Mademoiselle, perhaps?

ANGELA (*shaking her head*). I've got somebody to look after. Anyway, I'm not the marrying sort.

PRINCE (*smiling*). Mademoiselle, that is a challenge to Cupid which in the whole history of the world has never yet been refused. I shall dance at your wedding within a year. . . . Do you dance at weddings in this country?

ANGELA. Oh, Lord, at everything.

PRINCE. Then I dance. And the next year at Miss Imogen's.

ANGELA. Oh, Imogen, yes.

PRINCE (*thinking*). Miss Imogen. So dead when Madame her mother is there, so alive when she is alone.

ANGELA (*surprised*). I didn't know you'd seen her alone?

PRINCE. I know the type. It would be amusing to see if I am right. Is it permitted?

ANGELA. Permitted? It has been waited for all evening. (*Going to the door*) I'll send her.

[*She goes out.*]

PRINCE. Mademoiselle is too kind.

(*As soon as he is alone he feels in his pocket, and brings out a bunch of letters, and a note-case.*)

He selects a letter and some notes, and goes to the desk, where he puts them into an envelope which he addresses to himself. IMOGEN comes in, accompanied as far as the door by her mother.)

MRS. FAITHFULL (*giving her the last touches*). There ! . . . Perhaps just a little—— Yes. (*In a whisper*) “Your Highness” at first, and then “Prince Michael.” (*She vanishes.*)

IMOGEN (*coming in*). Hallo !

PRINCE (*getting up hastily*). Miss Imogen ! How kind of you !

IMOGEN. I say, do you know, I must tell you, before you came I said I didn’t believe you were a real Prince at all. Wasn’t it cheek ?

PRINCE. It was very natural, Mademoiselle.

IMOGEN. I say, you’re not really going to-night, and never coming back again, are you ?

PRINCE. It depends to some extent on yourself, Miss Imogen.

IMOGEN (*giggling*). I say ! Oughtn’t you to kiss my hand when you say things like that ?

PRINCE (*taking her hand*). Will you do something for me ?

IMOGEN. Rather ! Anything ! (*He kisses her hand.*) Oo ! Could it be something really wicked, so that I can tell Mother afterwards that it was the Prince who asked me to do it ? (*Giggling*) Oh, think of Mother’s face !

PRINCE. Alas, it is not really wicked.

IMOGEN (*dashed*). Oh !

PRINCE (*quickly*). But it is a secret. Between you and me. For evermore !

IMOGEN. Oo, that’s all right ! What is it ?

PRINCE. This is a very great secret. I cannot even explain to *you* what it means. Not yet. You must take me on trust.

IMOGEN (*remembering that last novel*). To the death, Prince Michael.

PRINCE (*touched*). You dear! (*He holds up the letter*.) I want this letter delivered here to-morrow morning. At five minutes to twelve. It is addressed to myself. Can you give it to one of your village boys to-morrow to bring up to the house?

IMOGEN. Rather!

PRINCE. If he is asked where it comes from, he is to say that a gentleman gave it to him.

IMOGEN (*eagerly*). Righto. I understand.

PRINCE. At five minutes to twelve exactly. . . . You will give him something? (*He takes out a handful of money and selects half-a-crown*.)

IMOGEN (*laughing*). Oo, I say! Half-a-crown! He'd suspect something at once. Sixpence.

PRINCE. You are a better conspirator than I. Sixpence. (*He gives it and the letter to her*.)

IMOGEN. 'Kyou. (*She puts the letter down her dress in the approved manner. See Chapter XIV*.)

PRINCE. In return, I give you the highest reward your country has to offer. "Imogen, you're a sportsman." (*He holds out his hand. IMOGEN takes it, and is completely carried away*.)

IMOGEN. My Prince! (*All funny suddenly*) Oo, I say, I believe I'm going to cry. (*Winking to keep the tears back*) A hanky, quick! (*He gives his to her. She blows her nose loudly, and dabs at her eyes*.)

PRINCE. Better?

IMOGEN (*nodding*). 'M. I say, I've ruined your hanky. I'll have to send it on to you. You'll tell me where, won't you?

PRINCE. That's all right.

IMOGEN. Honestly I didn't do it just to— (*Reluctantly*) Well, I suppose I *could* have used my own. But

I really was crying. (*Instinctively feeling the Presence in the neighbourhood*) Look out, here's Mother.

PRINCE (*in a whisper*). Five minutes to twelve!

IMOGEN (*in a whisper*). Right!

PRINCE (*aloud*). And you are fond of lawn tennis?

IMOGEN. Oh yes, Prince Michael!

MRS. FAITHFULL *comes in*

PRINCE (*bowing*). Madame!

MRS. FAITHFULL. Ah, Prince Michael, how kind of you to be taking an interest in my little girl. I hope she has been behaving nicely.

PRINCE. I give her what you call the good-conduct prize. The testimonial and the lucky sixpence. (*He laughs.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL (*extremely amused*). How delightful! We shall always remember, shan't we, Imogen? (*IMOGEN nods shyly*) I do hope, Prince Michael, that what Mrs. Bulger has been telling me is not true?

PRINCE (*anxiously*). What she has been telling you?

MRS. FAITHFULL. That you are going back to your own country, almost at once.

PRINCE (*relieved*). Ah! . . . So she tells you that. Well, it is "Perhaps" and "Perhaps not."

MRS. FAITHFULL. Well, that gives us a little hope, doesn't it, Imogen?

(*IMOGEN smiles shyly.*)

PRINCE. My head (*touching it*) say "You'd better go." My heart (*touching it*) say "Don't go!" My soul (*feeling for it vaguely*)—where is my soul?—My soul say "You ought to go." . . . They are still arguing. I wait for the verdict.

MRS. FAITHFULL (*laughing*). How amusing! We must remember that, mustn't we, Imogen?

PRINCE (*looking at his watch*). And my watch says,

"You *must* go." But he means only "Back to your hotel."

(ANGELA and BATTERSBY, JENNIFER and the HOLTS are coming in.)

ANGELA. Who *must* go?

JENNIFER. All of us, dear, I expect.

PRINCE. It is I, Miss Angela. I have a long way to go. You are all together here, at home.

BATTERSBY. Well, have a whisky first.

ROBERT (*looking at his watch*). By jove, yes.

PRINCE (*to BATTERSBY*). Thank you. Now where is my good Oliver?

ETHEL. Mr. Oliver was out with all of us.

BATTERSBY (*looking round the room*). That's funny. Where is Oliver?

ROBERT. He and Ainslie have gone off somewhere, I expect. (*He goes to the door.*)

ANGELA. Dr. Ainslie has gone. (*To the PRINCE*) He asked me to make his apologies. A message came for him.

BATTERSBY (*bringing whisky to the PRINCE*). Thank God I'm not a doctor. Help yourself, Holt.

ROBERT. Thanks. (*He goes to the table*) Mrs. Faithfull?

MRS. FAITHFULL. A little lemonade, please.

PRINCE. Thank you. (*He takes his whisky from BATTERSBY.*)

JENNIFER (*slowly and clearly*). I sent Mr. Oliver in to you about ten minutes ago, Prince Michael.

PRINCE (*amazed*). To me here? (*His glass stops in mid-air.*)

JENNIFER. Yes. (*She looks at him, wondering.*)

PRINCE. But what an extraordinary thing!

ANGELA. He's probably gone to see about the car.

PRINCE. Ah, yes ! No doubt. (*He drinks.*)

BATTERSBY. I'll tell him.

PRINCE. Pray don't trouble. He will be here directly.

BATTERSBY. It's all right. [*He is gone.*]

ROBERT (*to the PRINCE*). He can call to him from the end of the lawn, sir. You left the car in the road, sir, I suppose, sir ?

PRINCE (*anxiously*). Yes. It would be safe there ?

ANGELA. Oh, Lord, yes.

MRS. FAITHFULL. We are a very unsophisticated little colony here, Prince Michael.

JENNIFER. Well, we don't steal, anyway.

PRINCE (*raising his glass to her*). Only hearts.

(*She turns away.*)

ANGELA. I say, do help yourselves, all of you. Isn't there any lemonade ?

PRINCE. What can I get you ?

ANGELA. No, thanks. Jennifer ?

JENNIFER (*her eyes on the PRINCE*). No, thank you, dear.

ROBERT (*to IMOGEN*). What about you, Miss Faithfull ?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Just a little lemonade, please.

ROBERT. Right. (*He goes for it.*)

BATTERSBY (*coming in at the door*). I say, the car isn't there !

ETHEL. Not there ?

ANGELA. It must be.

BATTERSBY. Well, it isn't.

(*HOLT clicks his heels in front of the PRINCE, and goes out briskly, with the determination to see this thing through.*)

JENNIFER (*looking at the PRINCE*). What an extraordinary thing !

(*He catches her eye, there is a look of understanding between them, and he turns away.*)

PRINCE. Your lanes are narrow. He is turning round, perhaps.

ETHEL. Yes, that's it, I expect.

BATTERSBY. He wouldn't have to go as far as that. I should have heard the engine.

PRINCE. My good Oliver, I hope nothing has happened to him.

MRS. FAITHFULL. He has been very quiet all evening. I suppose—have you had him long?

PRINCE. You think he is—how do you call it?—a fraud?

JENNIFER. Fraud, humbug, impostor—we have various words for it. (*Again they exchange glances.*)

PRINCE. But my Oliver! So innocent-looking!

IMOGEN (*suddenly*). Bolsheviks!

(*They all turn quickly to her, and she subsides into her lemonade.*)

BATTERSBY. Well, it's very odd.

HOLT comes in.

ROBERT. The car isn't there, sir.

BATTERSBY (*a little ironically*). Thank you, Holt.

ANGELA. Well, that's that. He has run away, your Oliver.

PRINCE (*smiling*). Then I walk away. Is it not so?

ANGELA. Nonsense, you can't walk. We can put you up.

JENNIFER (*sweetly*). The Doctor could drive you to your hotel in his car.

PRINCE (*with pretended eagerness*). Ah!

ANGELA. He's out in it.

PRINCE (*with pretended disappointment*). Oh! (*He winks at JENNIFER.*)

ANGELA. Father can sleep in the studio. He often does, don't you, Father? (*She rings.*)

BATTERSBY. Yes, dear, yes. (*To the PRINCE*) I should say, "Yes, dear, yes," in any case, of course, but it does happen to be true in this case. I have a camp bed there.

PRINCE. You are too kind. But I have never slept in a studio. I should like the experience.

ANGELA. Father is much more——

EMILY *comes in*.

PRINCE (*holding up his hand*). Please! It will give less trouble.

ANGELA. Just as you like. (*To EMILY*) Make up the bed in the studio for Prince Michael.

EMILY. Yes, miss. [*She goes out.*]

MRS. FAITHFULL. We have a spare room, dear. I'm sure if Prince Michael——

ETHEL. So have we. We should be only——

JENNIFER (*sweetly*). Captain Holt also has a motor-bicycle.

PRINCE (*to HOLT*). Ah!

ROBERT. Not running just now, unfortunately.

PRINCE. Oh! (*Again he catches JENNIFER's eye.*) Then I am afraid, dear Miss Battersby, that I must trespass——

ANGELA. Of course. That's settled.

PRINCE (*to MRS. FAITHFULL and ETHEL*). And thank you, ladies, for your great kindness. I shall always remember it.

JENNIFER (*suddenly*). I must be going.

ANGELA. Oh, must you?

JENNIFER (*to the PRINCE*). I shall not see you again, Prince Michael——

ANGELA. Oh, look in in the morning and say good-bye.

JENNIFER. I'm afraid the Prince will have gone before

I can manage it. I shall be rather busy up till—noon.
Good-bye, Prince Michael.

PRINCE (*taking her hand and bowing over it*). It is always allowed one to hope. I shall give myself what comfort I can by saying, "*Au revoir*, Mrs. Bulger." (*He kisses her hand.*)

JENNIFER (*kissing her hand to them*). Good-night, everybody. (*They all say "Good-night."*) (*To ANGELA*) Good-bye, darling. It's been so delightful.

ANGELA. Good-bye.

(*She and her father withdraw a little from the others, and discuss the question of pyjamas for the*
PRINCE.)

JENNIFER (*with a meaning eye on the PRINCE*). I shall be round about—noon.

(*The PRINCE bows in understanding. With a wave she is gone.*)

(*The FAITHFULS and the HOLTS immediately surround the PRINCE.*)

MRS. FAITHFULL. We shall never let you go now, Prince.

ROBERT. No, look here, you must stop and play on Saturday. Do you bowl?

MRS. FAITHFULL. Our little party on Thursday—a few friends——

ETHEL (*to PRINCE*). I don't know if you're fond of fishing——

(*They have their backs to JENNIFER, who is looking through the open window. The PRINCE raises his glass to her mockingly, triumphantly. She shakes her fist at him, as the curtain comes down.*)

ACT III

It is 11.30 next morning. ANGELA is at the writing-desk, busy with a few letters. IMOGEN appears noiselessly at the window. She looks round the room, and then disappears again. BATTERSBY comes in from the dining-room.

BATTERSBY. We all seem very late this morning. Has the Prince *had* breakfast?

ANGELA. I sent it round to the studio. I thought he'd prefer a Continental one.

BATTERSBY. Probably the one thing he looked forward to was a welter of eggs and bacon. You've given him quite a wrong idea of our old English customs.

ANGELA. He can have eggs and bacon for lunch, if he's very keen. Have you seen him?

BATTERSBY. I borrowed him a razor from Ainslie, and I also took him some clothes.

ANGELA. Clothes—I forgot about that.

BATTERSBY. I don't say he'll be beautiful, but he'll be decent.

ANGELA. You'd better send over for his bag, and find out about the Oliver man.

BATTERSBY. I suggested it, but he asked me to wait. He's a little uncertain about his plans. He said something about a letter . . . I suppose the post *has* come?

ANGELA. Yes.

BATTERSBY (*without much hope*). Nothing for me, I suppose?

ANGELA. No.

BATTERSBY. I thought not. The number of people who sit down every morning and say "I don't think I'll write to Battersby to-day" is positively startling. There must be well over forty million of 'em in England alone.

ANGELA. He couldn't get a letter here anyway.

BATTERSBY. The Prince? I should be very much annoyed if he did. It would be very disconcerting if a man who stayed here accidentally for one night got a letter, and I who have stayed here on purpose for years and years got none. . . . I suppose the paper hasn't come?

ANGELA. No, not yet. I'll speak to Lumley. He's getting slack again.

BATTERSBY. There ought to be *some* method of getting in touch with the outside world. How would it be to have *The Times* sent down by post every day, and then it wouldn't matter if the Lumley boy were going for a whistle in this direction or not?

ANGELA. If you like, dear.

BATTERSBY. Besides, it would give the postman more respect for me, if he saw my name now and then. I met him in the garden yesterday as he was bringing up the letters. There were three for you, two for Emily, four for cook and a seed-catalogue for James. I passed it off with a careless laugh, but I could see what he was thinking. (*He looks over his shoulder, and sees her writing*) . . . Give my love to whoever it is, and say that I should dearly appreciate a post-card——

ANGELA. It's Debenham and Freebody.

BATTERSBY (*unmoved*). ——from either of them.

(*The PRINCE comes in. He is wearing an old coat and a pair of white flannel trousers*

of BATTERSBY'S. *He has shaved off his moustache.*)

PRINCE. Good-morning to you. What a charming day!

BATTERSBY. Good-morning, Prince.

ANGELA (*getting up*). Oh, good-morning. I do hope you slept well, and all that?

PRINCE. The bed couldn't have been more comfortable. . . . I had forgotten that there were so many birds in the country.

ANGELA. We're used to them, of course.

BATTERSBY. But the silly things don't realise it, and go on just the same. (*The PRINCE turns to him*) Hallo! I say! I hope that that razor——

PRINCE (*nodding*). It was carried away. It has shaved the good doctor so often, that before I knew what had happened——

BATTERSBY. We must tell Ainslie. As a scientific man, he'll be interested.

ANGELA. I like it. It makes you look more English.

PRINCE. That was why I did it, Mademoiselle. The only compliment to your country I could think of so early in the morning. The birds were whistling and singing, the sun was shining, and I said to myself, "I love England! I shall stay here for ever. I shall be an Englishman." So I had what you call the clean shave.

BATTERSBY (*fingering his beard*). It isn't *absolutely* essential.

PRINCE (*with a bow*). The full beard or nothing, as in your English navy. (*With a gesture at BATTERSBY'S*) If only it had been possible—(*regretfully*)—but there was no time.

BATTERSBY (*in a whisper*). You see, dear, he would have liked eggs and bacon.

PRINCE. So now I am an Englishman . . . I think of calling myself Brown.

ANGELA (*smiling*). Prince Brown.

PRINCE. Or shall I give myself the honourable, if not strictly beautiful, title of Mister ?

BATTERSBY. What would Neo-Slavonia say to that ?

PRINCE. Well, that's the question

ANGELA. Will the country go to pieces without you ?

PRINCE (*solemnly*). I fear it might. . . . But don't let me interrupt your letters, Mademoiselle. I shall be quite happy with the paper. (*He picks it up.*)

BATTERSBY. It's a piece of yesterday's, I'm afraid.

PRINCE. I shall be quite happy with a piece of yesterday's paper.

BATTERSBY. There's a small boy called Lumley whose duty it is to forget to bring the paper every day. He is amazingly reliable. So I generally go down about this time and fetch it for myself. If you don't mind——

ANGELA. Go on, Father. You'll never be happy till you've seen it.

BATTERSBY (*with dignity*). To some women the fact that anybody should be interested in activities outside his own household will always be one of the more impenetrable mysteries. (*He goes out with an air.*)

PRINCE. Miss Battersby is interested, however.

ANGELA. In some things.

PRINCE. In some people.

ANGELA (*smiling*). In two people. . . . (*Looking at her watch*) You won't go till she comes ?

PRINCE. I will stay until then, if I may. (*He also looks at his watch, and then says, a little anxiously*) This little boy of whom Mr. Battersby talks——

ANGELA. Lumley ?

PRINCE. Yes. He is unreliable ?

ANGELA. Very, I'm afraid.

PRINCE. You ask him to do something, and he goes off bird's-nesting, or fishing?

ANGELA. Rather like that.

PRINCE. However, there are perhaps other little boys in the village not so unreliable?

ANGELA. I expect they're all pretty much the same.

PRINCE. Oh! . . . (*We have another momentary glimpse of IMOGEN at the window*) . . . But I mustn't interrupt you. This piece of yesterday's paper is full of good things.

ANGELA (*addressing the envelope*). I've just finished.

(AINSLIE appears at the door.)

AINSLIE. May I come in?

ANGELA (*over her shoulder*). Hallo! Come in.

AINSLIE. Good morning. Good morning, Prince Michael.

PRINCE. Good morning, doctor. Still here, you see.

AINSLIE. I was sorry to have to hurry off last night, and so, hearing what had happened, I thought I would look in and make my apologies and good-byes this morning.

PRINCE. How charming of you. (*Smiling*) And a Republican, too!

AINSLIE. My manners are without prejudice to my convictions.

ANGELA. We're hoping that perhaps it won't be good-bye just yet.

AINSLIE. Oh, I'm glad. Jennifer gave me to understand that I should just have time to catch the Prince before he went.

PRINCE. How thoughtful of Mrs. Bulger.

ANGELA (*getting up, letters in hand*). You won't fight if I leave you alone for a moment?

PRINCE (*feeling AINSLIE's biceps*). No. I promise.

ANGELA. As long as you don't whistle the Neo-Slavonian national anthem, or anything provocative like that, he'll be all right. [*She goes out.*]

AINSLIE. I'm afraid I shouldn't recognise it. . . . (*Awkwardly*) I don't know the etiquette, but may I lean against a table or something?

PRINCE (*solemnly*). I think I should lean first. (*He does so*) There!

AINSLIE (*leaning too*). Thank you. (*He begins to fill his pipe*) You won't mind my saying that I wish I hadn't met you?

PRINCE. If you won't mind my asking why.

AINSLIE. I like keeping my prejudices intact. Are you the only Prince with a sense of humour, or have I been wrong all these years?

PRINCE. Isn't it against all medical etiquette for a doctor to be wrong?

AINSLIE. There you are! You've no business to say things like that. (*Preparing to light his pipe*) Do we smoke?

PRINCE. We smoke. (*He picks up one of BATTERSBY'S pipes, and holds it in his hand until AINSLIE'S pipe is alight. Then he solemnly puts it down again.*)

AINSLIE. Thank you. . . . Curious thing about that young Oliver. Have you heard any more this morning?

PRINCE. We are sending over to the hotel for news. We may hear something at any moment. (*He looks at his watch.*)

AINSLIE. I suppose you knew all about him?

PRINCE. Does one ever know all about anybody?

AINSLIE. I was thinking of his medical record.

PRINCE (*tapping his head*). He had an accident a few years ago. .

AINSLIE. Ah! Concussion?

PRINCE. I imagine so. A stray bullet—on the Indian

frontier, I understand. Such an accident might cause complete loss of memory and so forth, I suppose?

AINSLIE. Undoubtedly.

PRINCE. Thank you. (*Pretending to hand him money*)
Your fee.

AINSLIE (*laughing*). Will you appoint me court doctor?

PRINCE. Gladly.

AINSLIE. I shall look forward to it. Meanwhile there's a good deal to do in the village. Do we move?

PRINCE. We move. (*They move towards the door.*)

AINSLIE. I'm glad that we're not losing you just yet. (*Looking into the garden*) You weren't playing hide-and-seek in the garden just before I came?

PRINCE. No, Mr. Battersby had one or two things to do.

AINSLIE. I thought I saw—— But I daresay it was nothing. *Au revoir*, then. [*He goes out.*]

PRINCE. *Au revoir.*

(*He settles down to his paper. . . . IMOGEN appears again, and seeing that he is alone, whistles cautiously. He takes no notice. She whistles again—and again.*)

IMOGEN (*in a loud whisper*). I say!

PRINCE (*looking round*). Hallo! . . . Miss Imogen!
(*He gets up.*)

IMOGEN. Are you alone?

PRINCE. Utterly. (*He comes to her.*)

IMOGEN. I say, you've shaved off your moustache!

PRINCE (*feeling his face*). So I have.

IMOGEN. May I come in?

PRINCE. May I conduct you in? (*He gives her his hand and leads her in.*)

IMOGEN (*giggling*). I say, what fun!

PRINCE (*smiling*). Isn't it?

IMOGEN. You and me.

PRINCE. Us . . . Was that you whistling ?

IMOGEN. Yes.

PRINCE. It wasn't you whistling outside the studio this morning from about four o'clock till nine ?

IMOGEN. Not as long as that. I did whistle a bit.

PRINCE. Yes. . . . Now tell me. You did what I asked you ?

IMOGEN. Rather ! That's why I wanted to see you. Just to tell you I had.

PRINCE. Good !

IMOGEN. The boy is going to bring it up in about five minutes. That's right, isn't it ?

PRINCE. Perfect. . . . It isn't a boy called Lumley, I suppose ?

IMOGEN. Yes, it is. Why ?

PRINCE. Oh, nothing. . . . You're sure you can trust him ?

IMOGEN. I'm sure I *can't* trust him. And I told him so. And I'm going to watch him do it, and he doesn't get the sixpence until I've seen him do it.

PRINCE (*admiringly*). What an ally to have ! (*He holds out his hand*) Shake !

IMOGEN (*shaking it*). Oh, I say ! (*Shyly*) I say ?

PRINCE (*anxiously*). You aren't going to cry again ? (*She shakes her head.*) Well ?

IMOGEN. That sixpence you gave me to give him.

PRINCE (*anxiously*). It was a good one ?

IMOGEN. Oo, rather ! But would you mind if I gave him another one of my own instead ? (*Shyly*) Because . . . because. . . .

PRINCE (*smiling*). I wish you would, Imogen. And the other will be your lucky sixpence ?

IMOGEN (*nodding*). 'm. And you're not going now, are you ?

PRINCE. I think now I shall be able to stay.

IMOGEN. Is that why you shaved? So your enemies shouldn't know you?

PRINCE. Something like that. It's a symbol.

IMOGEN. Of what?

PRINCE. Victory, I hope. . . .

IMOGEN (*suddenly*). What's that?

PRINCE. What was it?

(*They listen.*)

IMOGEN. I must fly. At any moment we might be discovered alone together.

PRINCE. True. And there is also Lunley's boy to be watched.

IMOGEN. Oo, I say, I'd forgotten him. Good-bye, Prince Michael! (*He holds out his hand. Romantically she goes on one knee and kisses it. Then she goes off—crying again.*)

PRINCE. The darling! (*He returns to his paper. . . . And soon JENNIFER is at the door.*)

PRINCE (*without looking round*). I make it five minutes to twelve.

JENNIFER. So you are still here?

PRINCE (*getting up*). You gave me till noon.

JENNIFER. How did you know it was me?

PRINCE. What a silly question to ask! Of course I knew it was you! (*He turns to her.*)

JENNIFER. Michael!

PRINCE. What?

JENNIFER. Nothing. Why did you—(*with a wave of the hand*)—do that?

PRINCE. Do what?

JENNIFER. Shave your moustache.

PRINCE. I didn't. That wasn't *my* moustache. It was Prince Michael Robolski's.

JENNIFER (*eagerly*). You mean you've told Angela? She knows?

PRINCE. That I'm an—inventor?

JENNIFER. That you—yes. That we're both inventors.

PRINCE. My dear Jennifer, how could I? Think how awkward it would be for all of you! The things you all said to me last night! I couldn't be so cruel.

JENNIFER. Then go away now—and nobody need ever know.

PRINCE (*like a small boy*). But I don't *want* to go! I like Wych Trentham. I like Mr. Battersby. I like Miss Angela. I like the Doctor. I like Miss Faithfull. . . . I like Jennifer.

JENNIFER. One or the other, Michael.

PRINCE. The Doctor has just been up to say good-bye to me. The poor man was in tears. I daresay you met Miss Faithfull. She has just been up to say good-bye to me. The poor girl was in hysterics. Mr. Battersby, struggling with his emotions, lent me these trousers. He has now gone to buy me a paper. They all love me.

JENNIFER. Everybody loves a Prince.

PRINCE. Except Jennifer.

JENNIFER. They won't love plain Michael Brown.

PRINCE. And yet he is a very lovable man really.

JENNIFER. Well, do you go or stay?

PRINCE (*smiling*). I'll toss you for it. Heads I stay, tails I remain. (*He tosses*) It's tails. I remain. I remain, yours very sincerely, Michael Robolski.

JENNIFER. Then I tell Angela.

(ANGELA comes in, a letter in her hand.)

ANGELA. Hallo, darling! . . . Where's the doctor?

PRINCE. Gone. We embraced, and I gave him the Order of the Leopard, Fifth Class.

ANGELA. I've got a hundred things to do, so I'll leave

you to amuse each other. (*To the PRINCE*) You're staying to lunch, aren't you?

PRINCE (*with a look at JENNIFER*). Please.

ANGELA. Good. (*To JENNIFER*) You'd better, too, darling.

JENNIFER. Angela, dear, wait a moment.

PRINCE (*looking at his watch*). I make it *two* minutes to twelve. (*To JENNIFER*) I beg your pardon, I thought you asked me the time.

ANGELA. What is it? I really *am* busy. (*To the PRINCE*) Oh, this letter has just come for you.

PRINCE (*relieved*). Ah! Thank you. Is it permitted?

ANGELA. Of course. (*The PRINCE opens his letter.*)

JENNIFER. Wait a moment, dear. There's something I've got to tell you.

ANGELA. Exciting?

JENNIFER. It is rather.

PRINCE (*who is reading his letter*). Pardon! You would wish me to withdraw?

JENNIFER. I would wish you to stay.

PRINCE (*bowing*). May I just—— (*he indicates the letter, and finishes it*) Good! (*He takes a deep breath*) At last! (*To JENNIFER*) Now I am at your service, Madame.

JENNIFER. Angela, Prince Michael——

PRINCE. Just a moment, if I may interrupt you. You called me Prince Michael. I cannot leave you under that misapprehension any longer. Miss Battersby! My lips at last are unsealed. (*In his English voice*) I am *not* Prince Michael!

ANGELA (*casually*). Why not?

PRINCE (*with dignity*). I am trying to explain. (*Turning his letter*) At last I am at liberty to speak. I owe you the most sincere apology. You thought you were entertaining Prince Michael Robolski of Neo-Slavonia last night. In a sense you were. But it was not I.

ANGELA. What do you mean ?

PRINCE. I was only the humble secretary. He who called himself James Oliver was the real Prince.

JENNIFER. Oh !

PRINCE. You are surprised ?

JENNIFER (*recovering*). Just for the moment.

ANGELA. So you're an Englishman after all ?

PRINCE. Certainly. Three months ago the Prince engaged me as his secretary. I asked him what were my duties. He said, "To grow a moustache and listen." For a month I grew a moustache and listened, while he talked to me about Neo-Slavonia. In the end I felt that I knew the country even better than he did. Then he said, "Now if we go to a place where we are both unknown, can you pretend to be Prince Michael, while I pretend to be his secretary ?"

ANGELA. Why ?

PRINCE (*not knowing*). Why ?

JENNIFER. Yes, why ?

PRINCE. Why ? That was what I said. Why ? He gave reasons, political reasons, which would sound stupid to you if I repeated them now, but to one who understood Neo-Slavonian politics as I did, were very, very—er, very.

ANGELA. Where was this ?

PRINCE. Where was it ?

JENNIFER. Yes, where was it ?

PRINCE. Where was it ? . . . In a little seaport town called Bratsk. The—Cromer of Neo-Slavonia.

ANGELA. But I thought Neo-Slavonia had no coast-line.

JENNIFER (*eagerly*). Yes !

PRINCE (*reproachfully*). One small pier and a group of bathing-machines do not constitute a coast-line.

ANGELA. I beg your pardon.

JENNIFER. Silly of us.

ANGELA. Well?

PRINCE. We went to Monte Carlo—I as the Prince, he as my secretary. Every now and then he would disappear. It was not my business to follow him. I am engaged to grow a moustache, not to search for foot-prints. One day he takes me to England. “Very soon now,” he says, “we shall be able to reveal the truth.”

ANGELA (*smiling*). And so, very soon now, you are going to?

PRINCE (*with dignity*). I am doing it at this moment. He gives me permission in this letter. (*He taps the letter*) He also gives me my wages—(*he holds up the notes*)—instead of a month’s notice. I am my own master again. . . . And out of a job.

ANGELA. And that’s that?

PRINCE (*with a sigh of mental exhaustion*). That, roughly speaking, is that.

ANGELA. Well, I’m glad one of you was the Prince. I don’t know what Mrs. Faithfull would say if there had never been a Prince at all.

JENNIFER. There wasn’t.

PRINCE. Ha!

ANGELA. How do you mean, darling?

JENNIFER. There is no such country as Neo-Slavonia.

PRINCE. Ha again.

ANGELA (*calmly*). Darling, how *can* you know that?

JENNIFER. Have you ever seen it on the map?

ANGELA. Have you ever seen Czecho-Slovakia on the map?

PRINCE (*aside*). Or Maida Vale.

ANGELA. Or Maida Vale?

JENNIFER. No.

ANGELA. Well!

PRINCE. Well!

JENNIFER. Well, I wasn't certain either. So this morning I telegraphed to a friend in the Foreign Office.

ANGELA. But would *he* know?

PRINCE. How could *he* know?

JENNIFER (*displaying telegram*). Here is his answer. (*She gives it to Angela*) I said, "Where is Neo-Slavonia?" He replies—

ANGELA (*reading*). "Never heard of it." Well, of course, it mightn't be in his department. (*Handing back the telegram*) I don't think that that's conclusive.

PRINCE. I don't think that's at all conclusive.

JENNIFER. My dear, I *know* that there isn't such a country.

ANGELA. I don't see how you *can* know.

PRINCE. I don't see how any one can *know*.

ANGELA. You might suspect. (*To PRINCE*) What do *you* think?

PRINCE (*automatically*). What do *you* think? I mean, What do *I* think?

ANGELA. Well?

PRINCE (*after thought*). I believe Mrs. Bulger is right.

JENNIFER. Thank you.

ANGELA. But how—

PRINCE. I believe that he had made it all up.

ANGELA. But I thought you said you had actually been in Neo-Slavonia with him?

JENNIFER. Bratsk—the local Cromer.

PRINCE (*with dignity*). You go to a town—how do you know who the town belongs to? If he says it is a Neo-Slavonian town, why should I doubt him? I am engaged as a secretary, not as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. (*To ANGELA*). Yes, the more I think about it, the more I feel that he made it all up. (*Triumphantly*) And that's why he disappeared so suddenly last night—without even saying good-bye.

He saw that Mrs. Bulger was suspicious. (*Sadly*) Yes, I feel sure now that the Prince was an impostor. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Bulger?

JENNIFER. Entirely.

PRINCE (*to ANGELA*). You see, Mrs. Bulger agrees with me entirely. I wonder what his game was. It may have been just pure love of adventure. I shouldn't care to think too hardly of him. . . . Miss Battersby, how can I apologise for having brought this on you?

ANGELA. Mr. Oliver, it has been a privilege to listen to you.

JENNIFER. Oliver? (*To the PRINCE with a friendly smile*) Of course! Oliver.

PRINCE (*puzzled*). Oliver?

JENNIFER. Your name. You changed names with the Prince.

PRINCE (*recovering gallantly*). Not names. Identities.

ANGELA. Why not names?

JENNIFER. Why not names?

PRINCE (*wondering*). Well—

ANGELA. You took his—why didn't he take yours?

JENNIFER. Why didn't he take yours?

PRINCE. This is really rather embarrassing.

JENNIFER (*catching his eye*). Yes, I can see how embarrassing it is.

PRINCE (*suddenly*). Can you? Well, if you can't now, you will directly. Miss Battersby, the Prince refused to take my name. He said "No, I cannot take that horrible name."

ANGELA. Why?

PRINCE (*impressively*). Because my name is—Bulger!

JENNIFER (*staggered*). Oh!

PRINCE. You are surprised again?

JENNIFER. Just for another moment.

PRINCE BULGER (*to JENNIFER*). I have sometimes

wondered if we are relations? (*To ANGELA*). You remember how interested I was when you first told me your friend's name? I wondered then.

ANGELA. Jennifer's husband was a General in the Indian Army.

PRINCE (*eagerly*). Really? How odd! Not James?

JENNIFER (*weakly*). James.

PRINCE. How very curious!

ANGELA. Did you know him?

PRINCE. I *am* James Bulger of the Indian Army.

JENNIFER. No, no!

PRINCE (*quickly*). Or am I not? You see, Miss Battersby, I was knocked out rather badly in a small frontier skirmish—by a stray bullet—left for dead, captured by the advancing enemy. When I came to myself, my memory had gone. I remembered nothing. Not even my own identity. A flask in my possession with the name James Bulger on it and the simple inscription "Presented by a few old friends of the Hammersmith Temperance Association" was my only clue. But was it my own flask, or had James Bulger lent it to me? I shall never be certain. For at times I have had a curious feeling that my real name is—(*he looks at JENNIFER*)—Brown.

ANGELA. It sounds very likely. A lot of people are called Brown.

PRINCE. Is that so? (*To JENNIFER*) In that case you must permit me to return your husband's flask to you.

JENNIFER (*weakly*). Thank you. You haven't it on you?

PRINCE. And if you will be so very kind as to talk to me a little about him, it may be that you will strike some responsive chord in my memory, and set it vibrating.

ANGELA (*getting up*). That's a good idea. And when

you're quite certain who you're going to be, you must let me know. Anyway, you'll stay to lunch? I think you've earned it.

PRINCE. It is charming of you to have me.

ANGELA (*graciously*). Not at all. The excitement is ours. [*She goes out.*]

JENNIFER. Well, Michael? (*She sits down.*)

PRINCE (*triumphantly*). Well, Jennifer? (*He sits next to her. She turns away, and he turns away. They talk, back to back.*)

JENNIFER (*reluctantly*). You're very clever.

PRINCE. Aren't I?

JENNIFER. Naturally you've had a good deal of practice.

PRINCE. Naturally.

JENNIFER. I suppose you feel you've gained something by it all?

PRINCE. Lunch—anyway. If I had let myself be exposed by you, I shouldn't have had lunch.

JENNIFER. Oh, if you're as hungry as that—

PRINCE. I am afraid you haven't realised the extraordinary delicacy with which I have handled the matter?

JENNIFER. I hadn't, no.

PRINCE. You see, I wasn't sure what you wanted. Did you want to go on being the wife of General Bulger? If so, here I am, your long-lost husband, Bulger, miraculously restored to you. Did you want to confess the truth, that you are really Mrs. Michael Brown? Here am I, the only original Michael Brown. Or do you want to marry again, and try another name? Here am I, still at your service, prepared to remember that my name is—whatever you most fancy. (*Proudly*) Very few people could have been as tactful as that.

JENNIFER. But how considerate of you!

PRINCE (*modestly*). I am that sort of man.

JENNIFER. You seem to have provided for everything.

PRINCE. I tried to.

JENNIFER. And yet there was one possibility you overlooked.

PRINCE. Good Heavens, what?

JENNIFER. In your extraordinary delicacy you didn't allow for the fact that I might want to be left alone.

PRINCE (*looking at his watch*). For how long?

JENNIFER (*a little crossly*). What do you mean, for how long? When a woman says that she wants to be left alone, you don't ask her for how long.

PRINCE. Why not?

JENNIFER. I don't know why not. One doesn't. It's a ridiculous question. Naturally, I mean that I want to be left alone for ever.

PRINCE. I see. You mean till you're about ninety.

JENNIFER. No, I don't. I wasn't thinking about being ninety.

PRINCE. Good! Then what about eighty-nine? Suppose I drop in on your eighty-ninth birthday——

JENNIFER. I shall not be at home.

PRINCE. Not if I came in the afternoon—with a few flowers?

JENNIFER (*coldly*). I want to be left alone.

PRINCE. By me—or by everybody?

JENNIFER. By you. By everybody in the way you're talking about. I don't propose to marry again.

PRINCE (*gently*). It was I who was proposing.

JENNIFER. Then I am not open to offers of marriage.

PRINCE. Well, if you won't marry again, will you live with either of your two previous husbands?

JENNIFER. No.

PRINCE. You refuse?

JENNIFER. Absolutely.

PRINCE. You're very difficult to please.

JENNIFER. No, I'm not. I'm very easy to please. I only want you to go away.

PRINCE (*reproachfully*). After all the trouble I've taken?

JENNIFER. Go away.

PRINCE. It is a little hard on a man . . . who has been travelling for years . . . in an unknown country . . . to come back to his wife, and to find that—like Penelope . . . no, not like Penelope . . . well, it's a little hard.

JENNIFER. I should keep Penelope out of it, if I were you.

PRINCE. I was trying to.

JENNIFER. When Ulysses left her, he did at least give her some idea when he was coming back.

PRINCE. But what a wrong idea! "Back at Christmas," he said cheerfully, and it was twenty years before he saw her again.

JENNIFER. She knew what he was doing, anyhow.

PRINCE. Rescuing Helen, the most beautiful creature in the world. That would be a great comfort to any woman.

JENNIFER. I don't want to argue about it.

PRINCE. I went away in a much better cause than Ulysses. If you had read the right sort of stories when you were young you would have realised that, metaphorically speaking, you and I were in a sledge, pursued by a pack of wolves over the snowy steppes of Siberia. Ivan Ivanovitch, our faithful Cossack driver, flogs the fast-wearying horses; from time to time I empty my revolver into the advancing hordes and force them to stop and eat each other; all to no purpose. And then, when I make the supreme sacrifice by hurling myself into the midst of the ravening pack, what happens? I am blamed because I left the sledge suddenly, and forgot to say, "Back on the 25th"

JENNIFER. I don't think that that is a perfect parallel.

PRINCE. According to Einstein there are no perfect parallels. But I'm doing my best. (*He gets up*) I'm doing my best. (*She looks away*) Jenny! (*She has her hand to her ear, arranging the hair above it. He seizes her wrist—and then suddenly talks down her ear, as if it were a telephone, using her hand as the receiver*) Hallo, is that the exchange? I want Jenny. One in a million . . . Jenny, one in one double O, double O, double O . . . Yes. . . . Hallo, Jenny, is that you? . . . Guess! . . . No . . . No . . . I say, what swell people you know! . . . Shall I tell you? . . . Michael . . . Don't you remember Michael? The ugly fellow who was always grouching because he couldn't get a job. . . . Yes. Casual sort of fellow. . . . It's him . . . he . . . Oh, much the same. . . . I suppose you wouldn't let him come down to your village, and just *look* at you occasionally. . . . Oh, I don't know. He could sit behind you at church or something. . . . Oh, don't you? Then it's quite time you did. . . . You *wouldn't* care about it? . . . Oh! . . . Oh, I just wondered. I expect you're right. (*He hangs up the receiver and walks away, whistling carelessly, to the writing-desk, where he sits down and begins to write.*)

JENNIFER (*after watching him for a little*). What are you doing?

PRINCE. Making my will, and leaving everything to you, of course.

JENNIFER. Oh, are you shooting yourself?

PRINCE. Obviously.

JENNIFER. I thought you made a will when we first got married.

PRINCE (*annoyed*). Can't I do it again if I want to?

JENNIFER. Of course. But I thought I got the money

anyhow? Even if you died—what's the word? Rather a horrid one——

PRINCE. "Suddenly."

JENNIFER. Intestate. (*To herself as if commenting on a man who has died of this unfortunate complaint*) So painful, poor fellow!

PRINCE (*fiercely*). Good heavens, if a man can't make a remorseful will just before shooting himself, life becomes utterly impossible.

JENNIFER. I beg your pardon.

PRINCE. I'm sorry. Naturally I am a little on edge.

JENNIFER (*after a pause—to herself*). Four "s's" in "possessed." Some people only put three.

PRINCE. In my last moments I propose to allow myself perfect liberty in the matter.

JENNIFER (*after a pause*). Which would be the best solicitor to go to? My own or yours?

PRINCE. I leave that to you. (*Looking upwards*) I shall never meet either of them again. . . . (*Looking downwards*) At least, I hope not.

JENNIFER (*after a pause*). Michael!

PRINCE. H'sh, h'sh!

JENNIFER. Michael!

(*He doesn't answer. She trills like a telephone bell.*)

PRINCE. Damn that telephone. (*She rings again*) Oh, Lord! (*He gets up and goes to her, putting his left hand to her mouth, and her right hand to his ear.*)

JENNIFER. Hallo! . . . Hallo! . . . Oh, is that Prince Michael of Neo-Slavonia? . . . Yes! However did you guess? . . . Really? . . . A little bit older and fatter . . . What? . . . Oh, how sweet of you! . . . You can tell from the voice? Michael, how clever of you! . . . Well, you'll see for yourself. . . . Yes, that's what I wanted to say. . . . Just before you shoot yourself. . . . Oh, well, you must ask me . . . I don't know.

I haven't decided. . . . All right, I'll wait for you.
Good-bye.

(She kisses his hand. He kisses hers.)

PRINCE. Well, Jenny?

JENNIFER. Well, Mike?

PRINCE. I've come back.

JENNIFER. So it seems.

PRINCE. What about it?

JENNIFER. I don't know.

PRINCE. Shall we try?

JENNIFER *(nodding)*. If you like.

PRINCE. Thank you, Jenny.

JENNIFER. It's an experiment, of course.

PRINCE. Isn't that the most fun?

JENNIFER. You're an adventurer at heart, you know.

PRINCE. You too, Jennifer.

JENNIFER *(smiling)*. I suppose I am.

PRINCE. Adventurers, both.

JENNIFER. I suppose any morning I may wake up and find that you've gone off to be the Prince of some imaginary country.

PRINCE. And any afternoon I may wake up to find that you've run off with some imaginary General.

JENNIFER. Yes, we've got to remember that.

PRINCE. Yes. . . .

JENNIFER. Michael?

PRINCE. Jennifer.

JENNIFER. I think we'll keep an atlas in the house.

PRINCE *(nodding)*. And an Army List.

JENNIFER. And some day, perhaps, I shall come upon you looking wistfully at that atlas, wondering where Neo-Slavonia is.

PRINCE. And some day, perhaps, I shall find you fluttering the pages of that Army List, and wondering which General most wants a widow.

JENNIFER. And when that happens to either of us, then one will know that the other one——

PRINCE. Wants a little holiday.

JENNIFER. So they'll say to each other quite casually, "Oh, are *you* off?"

PRINCE. And off they'll go.

JENNIFER. And then when they've been away long enough——

PRINCE. Not four years this time——

JENNIFER. Only a little while——

PRINCE. They'll try to find each other again.

JENNIFER. And they will have so much to tell each other——

PRINCE. That they will never be bored.

JENNIFER. It might work that way.

PRINCE. It might.

JENNIFER (*holding out her hands*). Worth trying, Michael?

PRINCE (*taking them*). Worth trying, Jennifer.

(*As they stand there, BATTERSBY bursts in with the paper, obviously excited.*)

BATTERSBY. I say! I say! I say! Just as well I went to get the paper.

PRINCE (*vaguely, dropping JENNIFER's hands*). The paper?

BATTERSBY (*showing the place*). Look here, Prince! There! (*They take the paper and look at it together*) I say, Angela! (*He hurries off to her.*) I say! Angela! . . .

PRINCE (*reading*). Sudden Revolution in—— Neo-Slavonia! (*He stares blankly at her.*)

JENNIFER. But you said there wasn't!

PRINCE. There isn't! I invented it.

JENNIFER (*pointing to paper.*) But there must be!

PRINCE (*nodding*). There must be. (*Sadly*) Jennifer,

Jennifer, I thought I was a creator, and I'm just an ordinary impostor after all.

JENNIFER (*very soothingly*). Never mind, darling. Better luck *next* time !

(*Angela is at the door, a cigarette in her mouth, a cocktail in her hand.*)

ANGELA (*regarding them with an indulgent smile*). Come along, children !

(*Hand in hand, they walk past her, the children, and go out. . . . She follows them.*)

ARIADNE, OR BUSINESS FIRST

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

ARIADNE WINTER.

JOHN WINTER (*her husband*)

MARY (*maid*).

HECTOR CHADWICK

HESTER CHADWICK (*his wife*).

JANET INGLEBY.

HORACE MELDRUM.

SCENE : *Drawing-room of John Winter's house in the provincial town of Melchester.*

ACT I. Friday.

Scene 1 : Before dinner.

Scene 2 : Three hours later.

ACT II. Saturday. Late afternoon.

ACT III. Monday. Between tea and dinner.

THE first performance of this play in London took place at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on April 22, 1925, with the following cast :

John Winter - - - - ION SWINLEY.

Ariadne - - - - - FAY COMPTON.

Hector Chadwick - - - - JOHN DEVERELL.

Hester Chadwick - - - - LOUISE HAMPTON.

Janet Ingleby - - - - JOYCE KENNEDY.

Horace Meldrum - - - - ALLAN AYNESWORTH.

Mary - - - - - BARBARA EVEREST.

ACT I

SCENE I

The drawing-room of the Winters' house in Melchester. Like so many other rooms in England, it is a mixture of styles—the John style and the Ariadne style. The fire-place and mantelpiece, with its presentation clock and twin vases, is pure JOHN. Probably he insisted on the clock ; and ARIADNE, realising that the mantelpiece was now hopeless, encouraged him to put some of the other presents there. The pictures are JOHN, including the hand-painted water-colour of an unexpected part of Switzerland, given by a grateful lady-client, for whom he has appeared in the county court. There are one or two early JOHN pieces among the furniture and easily recognisable by their ugliness ; not that his taste is bad, but simply that a drawing-room requires so much furniture, and if an aunt or a sister or a foreclosed mortgage has provided a proportion of it, it is folly to waste good money in buying the same things over again. For to JOHN all money is good money ; to be sought, to be won, and not to be thrown away. ARIADNE doesn't like throwing it away, but she likes exchanging it for beautiful things, and here and there she has managed to do this. She also likes comfort, and there is a chair for JOHN and a sofa for herself which, to some of the Melchester ladies, seem almost indecently easy for a drawing-room.

On a small table there is a big bowl of roses, with a note tucked in the middle of them. We shall hear more about these.

The room is in darkness, for it is after seven on an autumn evening.

ARIADNE comes in and turns on the light. *She is a happy young woman with a sense of humour which finds itself well exercised in Melchester. Just at the moment she is in the middle of a quarrel with her husband, and she carries on her face the lingering afterglow of their last heated remarks to each other. Probably the afterglow is more pronounced on JOHN's face; we shall see directly. ARIADNE would be coolly ironical, for the most part. She walks round the room, takes the note from the roses, shrugs her shoulders at the writing, and puts it back again; then picks up the evening paper from a table, and sinks into the sofa.*

JOHN follows. *Undoubtedly he is ruffled, but he is not going to show it. As one of the leading solicitors of Melchester it is his business to control his feelings. But though his keen, intelligent, clean-shaven face may be a mask to his clients, ARIADNE can read every word of it. She gives him a look, and smiles to herself.*

JOHN (*looking at his watch*). Plenty of time. I thought I was going to be late. (*He compares his watch with the clock on the mantelpiece*) H'm. Fast again. (*He puts the hand of the clock five minutes back*) I shall have to have it seen to.

ARIADNE (*not looking up from her paper*). Oh, don't do that.

JOHN. They wouldn't keep it long.

ARIADNE (*with an ironical look at the clock*). I wasn't thinking of that.

JOHN. Well, what?

ARIADNE. It must be so nice always putting things right—and knowing you're right yourself.

JOHN (*with restraint*). I put my watch right by the Town Hall. That's how I know.

ARIADNE. The Town Hall puts all the watches right. How satisfactory for it.

JOHN (*ignoring this*). Anything in the paper?

ARIADNE. And the watches put all the presentation clocks right. And the kitchen clock takes its time from this one, so however wrong you are, there's always some one you can tell.

JOHN. I am afraid this is too subtle for me. Anything in the paper?

ARIADNE (*offering it to him*). Want it?

JOHN (*taking it*). Sure you're finished with it?

ARIADNE. Actually, no; but speaking as a wife, "Yes, John."

JOHN (*opening it*). I don't suppose there is much in it anyway.

ARIADNE. Not enough for two, apparently. We might take in another copy of it.

JOHN. My dear Ariadne, what a ridiculous suggestion!

ARIADNE. Why?

JOHN. Two copies of the same paper!

ARIADNE. Twenty-six shillings a year, that's all.

JOHN. Why throw away good money?

ARIADNE. But money, even if it's good money, is meant to be thrown away.

JOHN. Not on wanton extravagance like that.

ARIADNE. Surely if you get pleasure and profit from it, that's enough. If I pick up the paper first, you resent it, don't you? And if I have to wait for it until you have read every last word of the advertisements, well, however used I am to waiting, it leaves a little mark each time. So we should both be happier if we had two

copies, shouldn't we? And you can't often buy a little extra happiness every day for twenty-six shillings a year.

JOHN. What's the matter with you to-night?

ARIADNE. Working the remains of our quarrel off before our guests come.

JOHN (*anxiously*). You're going to be civil to Horace Meldrum?

ARIADNE. Of course!

JOHN. Why you ever started a quarrel about him I can't conceive.

ARIADNE. I oughtn't to have said quarrel. There was no quarrel. I merely said that I wouldn't have Mr. Meldrum in my house again, and you said that in that case you would ask him to dinner to-night. Hardly a quarrel.

JOHN. I explained quite clearly why we had to be polite to him.

ARIADNE. You explained that he was one of your most important clients.

JOHN. *The* most important.

ARIADNE. Yes. Oh, you put it very clearly.

JOHN. I am not the only solicitor in Melchester, you know.

ARIADNE. And Mr. Meldrum isn't the only bounder.

JOHN. I admit he's—well—what shall I say?

ARIADNE. Shall *I* say it?

JOHN. But I'm getting a good deal of his work, and if we can keep the right side of him there's no saying what it will lead to.

ARIADNE. That's what I feel.

JOHN. If he took offence suddenly about anything, he'd think nothing of going straight off to another solicitor——

ARIADNE. And making love straight off to another solicitor's wife.

JOHN. Oh, come ! You aren't a newly married girl. You know how to keep that sort of man in order.

ARIADNE. As a rule, yes. But in one of those awkward cases when you have to choose between preserving the honour and dignity of your husband and preserving the prosperity of his business——

JOHN. Nonsense ! That's going much too far.

ARIADNE. Almost the very words I said to Mr. Meldrum last time.

JOHN. I don't like having him here any more than you do, but I can't deliberately throw good money away.

ARIADNE. There's another way of putting that, you know.

JOHN. What ?

ARIADNE. I don't like throwing good money away, but I can't deliberately let my wife be insulted.

JOHN (*burying himself in his paper*). Insulted ! Rubbish !

(ARIADNE *stretches out a hand and takes the note from the bowl of roses.*)

ARIADNE (*holding the note out to him*). Here.

JOHN. What ?

ARIADNE. Your client's last letter to me

JOHN (*taking it*). You haven't opened it.

ARIADNE. I don't need to. I can guess what's inside it.

JOHN. But it might be important.

ARIADNE. I thought *you* would like to open it. You are my husband.

JOHN (*doubtfully*). When did it come ?

ARIADNE. This afternoon, with those flowers. (*She indicates the roses.*)

JOHN (*going round to inspect them*). Did Meldrum send you these ? How awfully decent of him. You can't get roses like that for nothing.

ARIADNE. You can't. . . . Aren't you going to open the letter?

JOHN. Why do you want me to?

ARIADNE. I know how he writes. I thought *you* would like to know.

JOHN (*uncertainly*). It's just—a few polite nothings.

ARIADNE. I daresay. Won't you read it? I have no secrets from you.

JOHN (*hesitatingly*). Well, it's—it's your letter.

ARIADNE. Are you afraid to?

JOHN. How do you mean afraid? It's your letter, why don't *you* open it?

ARIADNE. I know so well the sort of thing; you don't. Are you afraid to know?

JOHN. Of course not. (*But he turns it over nervously.*)

ARIADNE. Well?

JOHN (*offering it to her*). It isn't my letter. Why don't *you* open it? You refuse to? Very well. It's your letter, you refuse to open it. I have no right to. (*He tears the letter into four pieces and throws it into the waste-paper basket.*)

ARIADNE (*shaking her head at him*). Oh, John!

JOHN (*blustering*). Why do you make such a melodramatic fuss about a mere note like that? Perfectly harmless note accompanying a few flowers. Very decent of him, considering. Look at Hester. She's known him as long as I have. She doesn't make a fuss. He and Hector do a lot of business together. Do you think Hester makes a fuss when he goes to their house? Do you think she shrieks out that she is being insulted?

ARIADNE (*smiling*). Don't tempt me, John.

JOHN. I suppose now you are going to run down my sister. I suppose no one in Melchester is good enough for you. That's how it is.

ARIADNE. *You were once, John.*

JOHN. The long and the short of it is that you don't like Meldrum. If it's any satisfaction to you, neither do I. But for the sake of the business, on which you depend as much as I do, I ask you to be friendly to him. Well, polite, anyhow.

ARIADNE. I will be more than polite. I will be friendly. That I promise.

JOHN (*coming up to her*). You've got a way with you, you know. You can't pretend you haven't. I've seen you with all sorts of people, people you must have hated, smiling at 'em as sweetly as if you'd loved them all your life.

ARIADNE (*smiling to herself*). I will smile like that at Mr. Meldrum. Watch me.

JOHN. Only the other day Hester was admitting that there was something about you——

ARIADNE. How nice of her! I love to think of you and Hester having long talks about me, and your sister admitting things like that. (*She takes a rose from the bowl, and holds it up*) Aren't they pretty?

JOHN (*very friendly*). He throws his money about, doesn't he? But then he can afford to.

ARIADNE (*putting the rose in her dress*). I like people who throw it about.

JOHN. He's quite a good sort when you get to know him.

ARIADNE. I must get to know him, I can see.

(*And there the discussion ends for the moment.*)

JOHN (*looking at his watch*). Hester's late. She isn't usually late. I suppose Hector has been kept by some business. I don't know why one expects them always to be first——

ARIADNE. I suppose because they always are.

JOHN. Meldrum is sure to be late, of course.

ARIADNE. Detained—by business.

JOHN. Well, he *is* pretty busy just now with all these new cheap cottages he's putting up.

ARIADNE (*suitably impressed*). Ah! (JOHN *returns to his paper.*) (*After a pause*) Oh, by the way, I am going up to London to-morrow.

JOHN. To-morrow? Saturday?

ARIADNE. Yes.

JOHN (*a little annoyed*). Can't you wait till Wednesday?

ARIADNE. I don't like excursion trains. I suppose I'm fussy.

JOHN. Oh well. . . . What is it? Shopping?

ARIADNE. One or two things. I shall lunch at the club.

JOHN. The club! Now there's a needless extravagance. How many times do you go to your club in a year?

ARIADNE (*lightly*). I don't know, John, and I don't care, John, and I'm going to lunch there to-morrow, John. Now don't say another word while I get my smile ready for Hector.

JOHN (*suspiciously*). Smile?

ARIADNE. Smile of welcome.

(*A hearty voice is heard outside.*)

JOHN (*looking at his watch*). Here they are at last.

ARIADNE. I expect he forgot to put his watch right by the Town Hall.

MARY (*announcing*). Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick.

HECTOR, *a bore in the grand style, with every cliché at his command, a bore who—it would seem—really takes a pride in his art, has been too much for Hester. She has faded, without quite knowing why. She is still proud of HECTOR; one could not fail to be of so supreme an artist; and*

she has given up her right to the hearth-rug and the central position, without resentment ; but she feels that there should have been something more in life than HECTOR'S voice. She is fond of her brother, and has always known that ARIADNE was not good enough for him.)

HECTOR. Good evening !

JOHN. Ah, here you are.

ARIADNE (*offering a cheek*). Good evening, Hester.

HESTER. Good evening. Good evening, John. (*She goes and kisses him.*)

JOHN. Good evening, dear.

HECTOR (*shaking hands with ARIADNE*). I was afraid we were late. A rush of business came in just as I was leaving the office——

HESTER. Hector is very busy just now.

HECTOR (*taking out his watch*). Is that clock right, John?

JOHN. Right by the Town Hall.

HECTOR. That's good enough for me. (*Altering his watch*) I'm five minutes slow. Funny thing about watches. Now I daresay if somebody else wore this watch, it would be five minutes fast.

ARIADNE. You're too quick for it, Hector.

(*They sit down.*)

HESTER. Who else are coming ?

JOHN (*a little awkwardly*). Meldrum.

HECTOR. Horace Meldrum. Ah ! These new houses of his will be a pretty good thing for you, John. I suppose you've got the conveyancing of them.

JOHN. The Sutton Road ones anyhow. But you know what Meldrum is.

ARIADNE (*brightly*). We are going to get them all, Hector. We are going to do all Mr. Meldrum's work for him. Even if he gets mixed up in a divorce case we are going to act for him.

HESTER. My dear Ariadne !

JOHN. Ariadne's joking, of course.

HECTOR. *Honi soit*—and so on. Horace is much too careful to get mixed up in anything of that sort.

HESTER. Anybody else ?

ARIADNE. Janet Ingleby.

HESTER. Oh, Janet. And Charlie, I suppose ?

ARIADNE. No, not Charlie.

JOHN. We only knew at the last moment that Mr. Meldrum was coming, so we just got Miss Ingleby to make up the number.

HESTER. Oh, I see.

HECTOR. Charlie will be doing well for himself if that comes off. I wonder what old Ingleby will cut up for when his time comes. Any idea, John ?

JOHN. Hundred thousand. More.

ARIADNE. Good heavens ! We *must* be nice to Janet.

HECTOR (*profoundly impressed, to JOHN*). You don't mean it, you don't mean it.

JOHN. I don't *know*, of course.

ARIADNE (*disappointed*). Oh, aren't you his solicitor ?

JOHN. If I were, dear, I shouldn't even be able to guess at what he's worth.

HECTOR. Professional etiquette, Ariadne. The Law Society would rap you pretty sharply over the knuckles if you talked about your client's affairs in public, eh, John ?

JOHN. I can't imagine a decent solicitor doing it.

HESTER (*to ARIADNE*). Like doctors and bankers. It wouldn't do at all.

HECTOR. Secrets of the confessional. Even in the Law Courts—but I think that that point hasn't been decided yet.

ARIADNE (*apologetically*). Oh, I see. But who is the

lucky man who really knows how much Mr. Ingleby will—cut up for?

JOHN. Some London firm. Parkinsons, I think.

HESTER. He's always been like that. They even run an account at Harrod's, Janet tells me.

HECTOR. Uncivic of him. Distinctly uncivic.

ARIADNE. But you must have a local solicitor as well, mustn't you? Supposing a dog bit him outside the Town Hall——

JOHN (*considering*). County Court action. Yes, he would then, of course.

ARIADNE (*with decision*). Then in case a dog bites him, I shall be very nice to Janet.

HECTOR (*to HESTER*). What was that? I didn't quite get that.

HESTER. I don't think it was very important.

JOHN (*stiffly*). A joke of Ariadne's.

HECTOR. Well, well, nobody likes a good joke more than I do. Let's have it, Ariadne.

ARIADNE. Shall I explain it, John?

JOHN. I hardly think it necessary.

ARIADNE. I am sorry, Hector. You'll have to imagine it as being tremendously funny.

Enter MARY.

MARY (*announcing*). Miss Ingleby.

(JANET INGLEBY *is a handsome, rather discontented-looking girl of 25, with no illusions, a lazily dangerous tongue, and an eye to business.*)

JANET. Good evening. (*To ARIADNE*) How are you, dear? (*Shaking hands with the others*) I do hope I haven't come at the wrong moment.

HECTOR (*gallantly*). Could any moment be the wrong moment for a young and charming lady?

JANET. Easily.

HECTOR (*taken aback*). Oh !

JANET. If I had come in five minutes ago when you were all discussing me——

JOHN. No, no.

HECTOR. I protest, upon my soul, I protest.

JANET. Am I the last ?

ARIADNE. Mr. Meldrum.

JANET. Well, aren't we all going to discuss *him* now ?

HESTER. My dear Janet, as if we should.

ARIADNE. Of course not. We've done it already.

JANET. That's hardly fair, is it ? You ought to have waited for *me*.

JOHN (*with a smile*). We thought perhaps you would rather discuss Charlie.

HECTOR. Ah, how is my dear friend Charlie ?

JANET. Charlie is off.

HECTOR. Dear, dear !

ARIADNE. Oh, Janet ! Why ?

JANET. Father turned him down.

HESTER. I thought the modern girl didn't pay any attention to her father's views.

JANET. I don't suppose she does. But, if she's not a fool, she pays a good deal of attention to her father's money.

HECTOR. Dear, dear ! And so he threatened to cut you off with the proverbial shilling.

JANET. Yes. And both Charlie and I felt that a shilling wasn't enough.

ARIADNE (*reproachfully*). But he wasn't just marrying you for your money, dear ?

JANET. No, that was the trouble. Father said, " Look here, Janet, if any enterprising young man comes along who wants a wife and twenty thousand, to put into his business, I'm ready to talk to him. But this young

fellow isn't thinking about business at all. You'll just fritter the money away between you, and what's the good of that ? ”

HECTOR. Yes, I see his point.

JANET. Oh, so do I. You can't live on the interest of twenty thousand. You must *do* something with it. Charlie couldn't think of anything.

JOHN. Yes, that's true enough.

ARIADNE. Well, as long as you aren't broken-hearted, Janet.

JANET. Oh Lord, no. We had a very good time together, and that's all of that.

Enter MARY.

MARY (*announcing*). Mr. Meldrum.

(*Enter HORACE—handsome, if you like that style—dashing, as far as his weight will allow—a supreme egotist, without a wonder or a misgiving in him. A boulder undoubtedly, but in the heroic manner.*)

HORACE (*to the company*). Good evening, good evening. (*To ARIADNE*) Good evening, dear lady, I trust I am not late, but as I daresay your husband will have told you, I have a good deal on just now. (*With a nod*) Evening, John. (*To HESTER*) Ah, Mrs. Hector! and how has the world been treating *you* since I last saw you? Let me see, that was on Tuesday, wasn't it? (*HESTER murmurs that it was Monday, but he is already on his way to JANET.*) Ah, Miss Janet! I was talking to your father over the phone only this morning. You're looking very pretty, my dear. Got a new way of doing your hair, haven't you?

JANET. Yes, it is fairly new. *You* keep to your old way?

HORACE. Ha, ha, very good! I like a young woman to

show a bit of spirit. You'll get on, my dear. I always told your father so. (*To HECTOR*) Ah, Hector! Before I forget, come and have a talk with me on Monday. I've got something I can put in your way.

HECTOR. Splendid, splendid, my dear fellow.

HORACE (*taking out his watch and looking at the clock*). Yes, I thought I wasn't as late as all that. (*To JOHN*) You're a couple of minutes fast.

JOHN (*a little diffidently*). I don't think so. I put it right by the Town Hall clock.

ARIADNE. Yes, we put it right by the Town Hall.

HORACE (*with finality*). A couple of minutes fast.

JOHN. Oh—thank you. (*He goes to the clock and alters it. While he is doing this, MARY comes in.*)

ARIADNE. Dinner, Mary?

MARY. Yes, madam.

ARIADNE. Thank you. (*To the others*) Shall we go in?

(*There is a little natural hesitation near the door on the point of procedure. True, HESTER is a married woman, but then JANET'S father may cut up for a hundred thousand pounds. Fortunately HORACE keeps his head.*)

HORACE (*genially*). Ah, shall I go first?

(*He goes first. The others follow. As they go, JOHN at the door turns off the switches. The lamps by the fire are still alight—good money thrown away. Firmly, without hurrying, he walks across the room and puts them out; then back again after the others.*)

SCENE II

The curtain drops—to rise again three hours later. ARIADNE and HESTER are on the sofa, HESTER at work on something. The others are playing bridge. HORACE (with him JOHN) is winning; you can see it by the way he is

snapping down the cards ; JANET is losing and doesn't like it ; JOHN is dummy ; and HECTOR for once is not talking, save for an occasional " Ah ! " or " H'm ! " or " You play that."

HORACE. The last two are ours. Four tricks. That's thirty-two below. That's the rubber.

ARIADNE. Did you win, Mr. Meldrum ?

HORACE. I did, dear lady.

ARIADNE. How clever of you !

HECTOR. You know the old adage, Horace. Lucky at cards, unlucky in love.

ARIADNE. Oh, I'm sure that doesn't apply to Mr. Meldrum.

HORACE. I'm sure it doesn't too.

HESTER. How much have you lost, Hector ?

HECTOR. We haven't worked it out yet, dear.

JANET (*who has been scoring*). Four hundred and seventy—that's four and sixpence.

JOHN (*who is also scoring*). Five hundred and two.

HORACE. Five hundred and two, that's five shillings.

JANET. How do you make that ? (*She looks over his shoulder*) You have given yourself sixteen above, what's that for ?

JOHN. Simple honours.

HECTOR. We had the honours, dear boy.

JANET. Of course we did.

HECTOR. I had the knave.

JANET. And I had the queen and ten. Four and sixpence.

JOHN. Sorry. Four and sixpence.

HORACE (*calmly*). I had the knave.

HECTOR. My dear boy——

JANET. I distinctly remember——

HORACE. I had the knave.

JANET. I *know* Mr. Chadwick had the knave.

ARIADNE. Does it matter very much who had the knave ?

JANET (*to* HORACE). We'll turn up the tricks, if you like.

JOHN (*to* ARIADNE). It just makes the difference, dear.

HECTOR (*to* JANET). I'm afraid I've shuffled the cards now.

HORACE (*getting up*). Five shillings. Well, I'd sooner win it than lose it.

HECTOR (*getting up and coming over to the sofa*). You see, it's either five shillings or four and six, according to who had the knave.

ARIADNE. Dear me ! Then you all ought to have watched the poor man much more carefully.

JANET. I *know* Mr. Chadwick had it.

HORACE. Well, look here, I tell you what I'll do, Hector. I'll toss you ten shillings or nothing.

HECTOR. Right. (*HORACE spins a coin.*) Tails.

HORACE. Heads. My luck's in.

HECTOR (*making sure it was heads*). Right. (*He takes out a note which HORACE solemnly tucks away.*)

JANET (*defiantly to* JOHN). Four and six. (*She gives him the money.*)

JOHN. Thanks. That's all right.

HORACE. I'll help myself to another drink if nobody objects.

JOHN. Oh do ! Sorry ! What about you, Hester ?

HESTER. No, thank you.

HORACE. Mrs. John ? Can't I persuade you ?

ARIADNE. No, thank you.

HORACE (*humorously*). I can afford it, you know. I've won ten shillings. (*ARIADNE laughs kindly.*) Miss Janet, what about you ? Just to show there is no ill-feeling.

JANET (*still rather ruffled over that sixpence*). Thanks.

HESTER (*getting up*). Well, we ought to be going, I suppose. (*To HECTOR*) Are you ready?

HECTOR. Yes, dear. Ready, aye ready. (*They say good-byes, and JOHN goes to the door with them.*) (*To JANET*) I'm afraid it's no good offering you a lift, as you don't go our way.

ARIADNE (*to JANET*). Haven't you got the car, dear?

JANET. Good Lord, no. Father doesn't waste the car on *me* like that. I don't mind walking. It isn't far.

HECTOR (*relieved*). Ah well, that's all right.

JOHN (*from the door*). I'll see Miss Ingleby home.

JANET. No need to.

JOHN. Of course I will.

ARIADNE (*the perfect wife*). Of course he will! How is your father?

JANET (*not realising how nearly a dog bit him outside the Town Hall*). Oh, all right. Well then, I'll say good-night. And thanks very much.

ARIADNE. Good-night, dear. Sure you are all right?

JANET. Of course. Good-night, Mr. Meldrum.

HORACE. Good-night, Miss Janet. Remember me to your father. I'll be round seeing him one of these days, I expect.

JANET (*as she goes out*). Right. I'll count the spoons.

HORACE. Ha, ha, ha! Smart little devil. I like a girl with spirit.

(*Final good-nights are heard from the hall. Then after a pause comes "Ready?" from JOHN and "Right" from JANET. After another pause the front door is heard to shut. During this, HORACE has been staring at ARIADNE, the self-assured stare of the man who is certain that that is what a pretty woman likes. ARIADNE sits demurely on the sofa waiting for him to begin.*)

HORACE. I got your message.

ARIADNE. What message was that ?

HORACE. The one you are sending me now.

ARIADNE. Am I ?

HORACE. Your rose, dear lady.

ARIADNE (*demurely*). Oh !

HORACE. My rose.

ARIADNE (*more demurely*). Oh !

HORACE. Our rose.

ARIADNE (*most demurely*). Oh !

HORACE. How beautiful it looks there. (*Striving for the right metaphor*) Nesting.

ARIADNE. I didn't know roses did that.

HORACE. Ariadne's does. It nests in her bosom like a—like——

ARIADNE. It *is* difficult, isn't it ? You'll have to start again.

HORACE (*who has probably had just a little too much whisky*). Like a dove. Like a little dove. A little pink dove.

ARIADNE. Fancy ! I wonder what a pink dove looks like, nesting in a buttonhole. (*He comes towards her. She takes it out of her dress and puts it in his buttonhole*) There ! It looks just like a rose.

HORACE. Thank you, dear lady. (*He kisses her fingers ; then goes back to his place, and expands himself*) Somehow I never feel properly dressed until a pretty woman has put a flower in my buttonhole. (*He stands in front of the fireplace jingling his money.*)

ARIADNE. Had a good week ?

HORACE. Pretty fair, pretty fair. And a bit more to come to-morrow morning.

ARIADNE. I suppose I mustn't ask how much.

HORACE. You'd be surprised if I told you.

ARIADNE. Try me.

HORACE. Not far short of a cool thousand. That's about what it will work out at for the week.

ARIADNE. A cool thousand! Fancy. And a bachelor. No wonder you are always properly dressed.

HORACE. So to-morrow afternoon I am running up to dear old London to see what Piccadilly Circus looks like.

ARIADNE. On business?

HORACE (*chuckling*). Strictly on business. Strictly on business. And if anybody asks me what business, I shall say that's *my* business. (*He laughs heartily.*)

ARIADNE. Then I shan't ask you what business.

HORACE. I'd tell *you*, my dear lady. I'm going to see my doctor. Ha, ha! That's a good one. My doctor.

ARIADNE. Yes, that's a good one. I like that one.

HORACE. Joking apart, my dear, I'll tell you why I'm going to London. Just for a little bit of fun. Just a little bit of fun after a hard week's work. On a Friday night I say to myself sometimes, "Horace, you've been a good boy all the week, and you've earned your little bit of fun."

ARIADNE. I'm sure you have.

HORACE. That's what I call going to see my doctor. Doctor Fun I call him. L. B. Fun.

ARIADNE. What amusing things you say.

HORACE. Little Bitta Fun. L. B. Fun—see it?

ARIADNE. Yes, now I do.

HORACE. Well, that's what I'm going to London for. Get up in time for lunch. What about a cosy little lunch at Frascati's; just as a start?

ARIADNE. Alone?

HORACE. Aha, dear lady, that's telling.

ARIADNE. Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked.

HORACE. Well, let's say not quite alone. A little

bit of pink muslin opposite, with perhaps something inside it.

ARIADNE. What a sweet way of putting it.

HORACE. After lunch—what shall we say? You shall say, dear lady.

ARIADNE. Well—what about the South Kensington Museum?

HORACE (*much amused*). Aha, that's a good one! A visit to the South Kensington Museum, tea with the Dean of St. Paul's, dinner at an A.B.C., a concert at the Albert Hall, and a snack of something at Fulham Palace to end up with. Ha, ha, ha! That's me!

ARIADNE (*pretending to be offended*). I don't believe you're serious. You're laughing at me.

HORACE. Laughing at you? Bless my soul, whatever put that into your pretty little head? Look in at the South Kensington Museum at three o'clock to-morrow, and you will find your humble servant talking to the head keeper.

ARIADNE. I've a good mind to take you at your word, and look in at three o'clock.

HORACE (*coming closer to her*). Why don't you?

ARIADNE. I shan't have time, I'm afraid. I'm catching the 3.10 back.

HORACE. Back? Are *you* going to London to-morrow?

ARIADNE. Yes.

HORACE. Fancy that. Alone?

ARIADNE. I don't know yet.

HORACE. When will you know?

ARIADNE. Perhaps in a minute or two.

HORACE (*joining her on the sofa*). How very curious that you should be going to London to-morrow—too.

ARIADNE. That's what John said.

HORACE (*doubtfully*). John? So John said that. Why did John say that?

ARIADNE. He said that it was cheaper to go on Wednesday.

HORACE (*relieved*). Oh, I see! But only if you go third class.

ARIADNE. But then I always do.

HORACE. Poor little woman, what a shame!

ARIADNE. Why? It's much more amusing.

HORACE. If you are alone, perhaps——

ARIADNE. Oh, you are never alone third class.

HORACE (*getting very close*). But for two it's much more amusing first class.

ARIADNE. Is it?

HORACE. Particularly if the guard is a friend of yours.

ARIADNE. Oh?

HORACE. He's a very great friend of mine.

ARIADNE. Oh!

HORACE. It's funny we should both be going to London to-morrow, isn't it?

ARIADNE. But we mightn't both be going by the same train.

HORACE. Ah! . . . What train are you going by?

ARIADNE. The 10.15.

HORACE (*disappointed*). Oh! That's a pity.

ARIADNE. Why?

HORACE. I can't get away before the 12.5. There's a bit of business I've got to see to——

ARIADNE (*demurely*). I think I *am* going first class.

HORACE (*considering*). It may mean a matter of a hundred pounds——

ARIADNE. Or aren't there any first-class carriages on the 10.15 train?

HORACE (*making up his mind*). No, dammit, one can't throw away good business just for a bit of fun.

ARIADNE. Not even if it wore pink muslin?

HORACE (*slapping his knee*). That's it! You do your

shopping or whatever it is, and I'll come up later, call for you wherever you like, and we'll have that little lunch at Frascati's. How's that? I'll be with you at half-past one.

ARIADNE. Well, of course, I do like something to eat about then.

HORACE. Right! That's a bet! Where do I pick you up?

ARIADNE. Well, I shall be at my club——

HORACE (*jovially contemptuous*). Your club! You women and your clubs! But bless you, in spite of your votes and your clubs and your cigarettes, you are just the same women under your clothes as Eve was before you. And, thank God, you always will be.

ARIADNE. Yes, but that isn't the address of the club. Or don't you want to know the address?

HORACE. Well, give us the name. I suppose the cabman will know where it is.

ARIADNE. The United Arts.

HORACE (*whipping out his pencil and writing on his cuff*).
A. W. United Arts, 1.30.

ARIADNE (*watching him*). What an interesting time your laundress must have.

HORACE. Naturally, I never put any business secrets there. (*He puts back his pencil.*)

ARIADNE. A very wise distinction.

HORACE. One-thirty at the United Arts. And now what about that train back?

ARIADNE. Which one?

HORACE. Exactly, which one?

ARIADNE. I'm catching the 3.10.

HORACE. But that makes it such a very little bit of fun.

ARIADNE. I think John will expect me——

HORACE. Not if you tell him you are coming by a later one.

ARIADNE. Is there a later one ?

HORACE. There's one about five.

ARIADNE. I don't think I know that one.

HORACE. It isn't a very good one. There's a better one about eight.

ARIADNE. It seems a much later one.

HORACE. But the best of them all is the 10.45.

ARIADNE. Why is that the best of them all ?

HORACE. I would try to explain why—before we caught it.

ARIADNE. It seems a very long explanation.

HORACE. You wouldn't be bored.

ARIADNE. Attractive man !

HORACE. Adorable woman !

ARIADNE. You seem very certain of yourself.

HORACE. It isn't difficult to entertain a pretty woman

ARIADNE. Experienced man !

HORACE. Well, yes, I've knocked about a bit.

ARIADNE. But all women like that, don't they ?

HORACE. They do, you may take my word for it.

ARIADNE. I don't think I shall go to London to-morrow.

HORACE. Oh yes, you will.

ARIADNE. Well, perhaps I will.

HORACE. Of course you will.

ARIADNE. But I shall come back by the 3 train.

HORACE. Oh no, you won't.

ARIADNE. Well, perhaps I won't.

HORACE. Of course you won't.

ARIADNE. Masterful man !

HORACE. I know how to manage women, bless their pretty little faces.

ARIADNE. I can see you do.

HORACE. Now, let's be practical.

ARIADNE. Business-like.

HORACE. You can't be shopping in London till ten o'clock at night; you'll have to say you've been called away suddenly—to a sick relative.

ARIADNE. Why are sick people always supposed to want their relations so badly? I never want anybody when I'm looking my worst.

HORACE. Have you got any relations?

ARIADNE. Heaps—and all John's.

HORACE. Any in London of your own?

ARIADNE. An uncle. I was telling Hester about him. He lost his liver in Burmah. He's touchy about it now.

HORACE. Well, there you are; he's ill. D'you see? You leave a note to-morrow to say you've just been rung up as you were starting to the station. Uncle dying. May not be back till late. See?

ARIADNE. I see. Isn't it rather deceitful?

HORACE. Little bit of fun. What's the harm in a little bit of fun?

ARIADNE. True. You mustn't think I haven't got a sense of humour.

HORACE. Well then, you see, it doesn't matter *what* time you come back. Your ground's prepared . . . even if—— (*He hesitates.*)

ARIADNE. Well?

HORACE. Even if—(*very softly*)—we found a better train than the 10.45.

ARIADNE. But I thought you said that that was the best?

HORACE. The best—on Saturday night.

ARIADNE (*looking at him thoughtfully*). Do you know you're a very wonderful man? (*HORACE laughs comfortably.*) Even I—hardly realised—— (*He leans towards her. She gets up hastily.*)

HORACE. What is it?

ARIADNE. John. I heard the door.

HORACE (*getting up*). One-thirty. (*He kisses his hand to her.*)

JOHN *comes in.*

ARIADNE. How quick you've been!

HORACE. Well, I must be getting along.

ARIADNE. Oh no! Must you?

JOHN. Have another drink?

HORACE. No thanks, my boy. (*To ARIADNE*) Afraid I must, Mrs. John. Got a lot to do to-morrow. (*Holding out his hand*) Good-bye—and thank you for a most delightful evening.

ARIADNE. Good-night. I've enjoyed it too, you know.

HORACE. How nice of you! (*To JOHN*) No, don't bother.

(*But JOHN insists on seeing his most important client out. Alone, ARIADNE drops into the sofa with the evening paper.*)

JOHN (*coming back*). Well! It wasn't so bad after all, was it? (*He pours himself out a drink.*)

ARIADNE (*reading her paper*). Not so bad.

JOHN. Did you get on with Meldrum all right?

ARIADNE. Quite all right, John.

JOHN (*with a sigh of relief*). That's good.

(*He drinks.*)

ACT II

Saturday. About five o'clock. HESTER and HECTOR are outside ; we hear their voices. MARY is telling them that her mistress is out. She opens the door, and they come in.

HESTER. Oh ! Then will you tell your master we're here ?

MARY. Yes, madam. I think he's just come in.

HESTER. Where has your mistress gone ?

MARY. She has gone up to London, madam.

HESTER. London !

MARY. Yes, madam.

HESTER. When do you expect her back ?

MARY. She didn't say, madam. She had a dressing-case with her, but she didn't say she was staying the night.

HESTER. A dressing-case !

MARY. Yes, madam. I'll tell the master you're here.
[*She goes out.*]

HESTER. London. She didn't say anything about London last night, did she ?

HECTOR. Nothing. It's very odd.

HESTER. I wonder if——

HECTOR. What ?

HESTER. She was telling us after dinner, before you came in, that her uncle——

HECTOR. The General?

HESTER. Yes—was suffering from indigestion very badly. We happened to be talking about illnesses.

HECTOR. You think that a sudden fatal stroke—fatal spasm, perhaps I should say——

HESTER. Being Saturday it looks like something urgent.

HECTOR. Evidently.

HESTER. If it had been Wednesday, it wouldn't have been so surprising.

HECTOR. The General, no doubt. . . . I suppose he's pretty comfortably off?

HESTER. He has his pension, of course.

HECTOR. But that would die with him. Anything to leave? Anything to come in Ariadne's direction?

HESTER. I shouldn't think so. She would have told us.

HECTOR. Ariadne's queer in some ways. It would be just like her not to have said anything about it.

(HESTER *sees the letter on the mantelpiece.*)

HESTER. Ah, there you are!

HECTOR. What?

HESTER. A note for John. (*She picks it up.*)

HECTOR. From Ariadne?

HESTER. Yes. Called away suddenly, you see.

HECTOR (*going up to examine the envelope*). Now what would you say that meant? (*He gives the matter his full consideration.*) I see it like this. If the General's attack had actually been fatal, she would have rung John up at his office.

HESTER. He would have gone with her in that case.

HECTOR. That may be. He is very busy just now. The point is that she would have rung him up. Leaving a note makes it clear that, whatever has happened to the General, it is no more than a preliminary warning.

HESTER (*looking at the envelope*). Sprawly handwriting.

(JOHN comes in, and they back hastily away from the letter.)

JOHN. Hullo !

HESTER. Ah, here you are.

(JOHN kisses her and shakes hands solemnly with HECTOR.)

JOHN. Didn't expect you to-day. I had to go over to Handfield. Only just got back.

HESTER. I've heard of a cook for Ariadne—so I just——

HECTOR. I thought I'd just walk round with her, and pass the time of day.

HESTER. She's gone to London, I hear.

JOHN. Yes.

HECTOR. No bad news from the General, I trust.

JOHN. The General ?

HECTOR. We supposed that she must have been called away suddenly.

JOHN. Oh no. Shopping !

HESTER. On a Saturday ?

JOHN. She particularly wanted to go. I suggested that she should wait till Wednesday.

HECTOR. Exactly ! That was what misled us.

HESTER. But the shops would be shut on Saturday afternoon. . . . Besides, why stay the night ?

JOHN (*surprised*). But she's not staying the night.

HESTER. Oh, well, Mary said——

HECTOR. Her dressing-case——

HESTER. There's a note for you.

JOHN. What ? Oh yes ! (*He goes to it.*) She caught a very early train.

HESTER. Oh, well ! But it's a funny day to go.

HECTOR (*taking out his pocket time-table*). The 10.15, I suppose. Let me see, if she caught the 10.15—they've altered it now. It used to run into King's

Cross at—— Here we are—10.15. Runs into King's
Cross at——

JOHN. Good God !

HESTER. What is it, John ?

HECTOR (*resigned*). Ah ! He *is* dead.

JOHN. It's impossible !

HECTOR. Not impossible, my dear boy. Inevitable,
alas ! But none the less distressing.

JOHN. Ariadne !

HESTER. What is it, John ? Let me look. (*She takes
the letter from him.*)

JOHN. It's ridiculous !

HECTOR. Well, but what is it, my dear boy ? (*Trying
to get at the letter*) May I——

HESTER. Good gracious !

HECTOR. May I be allowed——

HESTER. Had you any idea of this ?

JOHN. Is it likely ?

HECTOR. Might I——

HESTER. But *why* ?

JOHN. Why, indeed !

HECTOR. *Might* I be allowed—— (*He gets the letter
at last. They watch him reading it.*) Merciful heavens !

JOHN. I don't believe it.

HECTOR. My old friend Horace Meldrum !

HESTER. She doesn't actually say Mr. Meldrum.

HECTOR. True. Let us be fair. She just says
Horace. " Horace and I are going into the unknown
together. Do not try to follow us." But if it is not
Horace Meldrum, who can it be ?

HESTER (*to JOHN*). Did she know any other
Horace ?

HECTOR. There *are* no other Horaces.

JOHN. Not that I know of. But it can't be Meldrum.
That's impossible.

HECTOR (*turning over the letter*). Ah, a postscript! This may throw more light on the matter.

JOHN. A postscript?

HESTER (*trying to look over his shoulder*). I didn't see that.

HECTOR. "P.S. I am putting this against the clock so that you will be sure to see it." That, at any rate, shows thoughtfulness.

JOHN (*bitterly*). Ha! (*To* HECTOR) Here, give it me! (*He takes the letter.*)

HESTER. Why do you say it can't be Mr. Meldrum?

JOHN. She hates him. She told me so only yesterday.

HESTER. Ah!

HECTOR. Hate and love! You know what the old adage says. Love and Hate—I forget the actual wording.

JOHN (*fiercely*). I tell you she hated him. She thought he was a bounder.

HECTOR (*staggered*). My old friend Horace Meldrum a bounder!

JOHN. A bounder, I tell you! A cad! That's not love!

HESTER. It might be deception.

HECTOR. You think she was just throwing dust in his eyes? It may be so.

JOHN (*going to the door*). I'll ring up Meldrum now. I'll prove it to you——

HECTOR (*suddenly*). John! My poor John!

JOHN (*turning back at the door*). What?

HECTOR. To think that it should have escaped my memory!

HESTER. What? You never told me.

HECTOR. How can I have been so foolish! I called in to see Horace Meldrum earlier this afternoon on a small matter of business——

JOHN (*eagerly*). Well ?

HECTOR. I was told that he had gone to London.

JOHN. Good God !

HESTER. Are you sure, Hector ?

HECTOR. My dear, how can I be mistaken now that it comes back to me ?

HESTER. Well, that's odd certainly.

JOHN. Perhaps Ariadne didn't go herself, after all. Perhaps she has just gone out somewhere in the town.

HESTER. Mary told us she had gone to London.

JOHN. Did she ? . . . What were you saying about a dressing-case ?

HECTOR. Taking, according to Mary, a dressing-case with her.

HESTER. Why should she do that ?

HECTOR. And not on a Wednesday, mark you, but a Saturday !

HESTER. On the excuse of doing some shopping.

JOHN. Mary told you, you say. Well, I'll make sure of that anyway. (*He strides across the room and rings the bell.*)

HECTOR. Steady, dear boy, steady !

HESTER. Don't bring the servants into it until you have to, John.

JOHN. Yes, that's true. . . . But I've rung.

HECTOR (*holding up a large white hand*). Allow me to deal with it.

[He goes out and is heard dealing with it.]

HESTER. I'm always so frightened of the servants knowing anything.

HECTOR (*outside*). Have you—ah, it's all right, thank you. I thought I had mislaid a small parcel. Yes, that was all, thank you. (*He comes in with a brown paper bag which he puts down*) Don't let me forget that, dear, when we go. (*To JOHN*) A small pine for dessert to-morrow.

HESTER. Well, they both went to London. That seems certain.

JOHN. Why shouldn't they both go to London?

HECTOR. Why not? But you have her letter, and you have the corroborative evidence of the dressing-case and the absence of Meldrum. We must reconcile ourselves to the facts.

JOHN. The letter, yes. (*He reads it again.*)

HESTER. What is it she says about some disagreement with you?

HECTOR. Yes, she brought *me* into it there.

HESTER (*taking the letter*). May I? (*Reading it*) Yes, this. "We are poles asunder, as Hector would say, on the most vitally important thing in life."

HECTOR. Why as *I* would say? I don't recollect ever using the phrase.

HESTER. The most vitally important thing in life. (*Giving him back the letter*) What was that, John?

HECTOR. Some money trouble? The question of her allowance?

JOHN. No, no. She knows I never grudged her anything. This comes out of a clear sky.

HECTOR. I understand, my dear fellow; a thunderbolt from the blue.

JOHN. There was the usual give and take of married life, of course. But she was happy. You saw her last night. Wouldn't you have said she was as happy as—well, as anybody else?

HESTER. She seemed much as usual, certainly.

(*There is a short silence.*)

JOHN (*suddenly*). Why, of course!

HESTER. What?

JOHN. That letter.

HECTOR. You have it.

JOHN. No, the one he wrote to her.

HESTER. When? You haven't told us of this.

JOHN. Last night—he sent those flowers and a letter.

HECTOR. Flowers and a letter! Now we are getting to something tangible. What did the letter say?

JOHN. I didn't read it.

HESTER. Well, but she may have left it somewhere.

JOHN (*awkwardly*). No. I—she tore it up.

HESTER. In here?

JOHN. Yes. (*He goes to the basket, looks in it, then rings the bell*) Cleared away, of course.

HESTER. John, what are you doing?

HECTOR. Steady, dear boy, steady.

JOHN. They have the waste paper in the kitchen, I suppose. What happens to it?

HESTER. But you can't ask the servants about a torn-up letter.

JOHN. Why not? A business letter accidentally thrown away—

HESTER. No, no! It's so—you can't. They will guess.

JOHN. They'll guess soon enough if every time I ring the bell I have to send out Hector to make an excuse for it.

HESTER (*proudly*). Hector will think of something *without* going out this time.

HECTOR. Er—yes—er—— (*The door opens and he hastily whispers to JOHN.*)

MARY. Did you ring, sir?

JOHN. A whisky and soda for Mr. Chadwick.

MARY. Yes, sir.

[*She goes out.*]

HECTOR (*apologetically*). On the spur of the moment, and seeing what a warm day it is——

HESTER. In any case, John, she saw him last night. Were they alone together after we'd gone?

JOHN (*reluctantly*). Ye—yes. I saw Janet home, you know.

HESTER. Of course. Then there you are !

(*They are all silent, thinking. JOHN looks at his watch and automatically looks at the clock.*)

HECTOR (*keeping all their spirits up*). The old clock keeping pretty good time ? (*But, for once, nobody minds.*)

JOHN (*suddenly*). I shall go to London.

HECTOR. Ah !

HESTER. What can you do there ?

JOHN. Make inquiries at her club. Something. Anything.

HECTOR. Her club. Come ! This gives us a starting-point. We must explore every avenue. Her club. (*He thinks.*)

HESTER (*for it still rankles*). Why did she ever want a club—in London ?

JOHN. She said she was going to lunch there. I could find that out anyhow.

HECTOR (*with great presence of mind*). Tsss ! (*MARY is coming in with the whisky. He hurries forward to take charge of it.*) Thank you. (*Bottle in hand*) John ?

[*MARY goes out.*]

JOHN. No, no.

HECTOR (*pouring himself out one*). You won't mind if I do ? You won't think it unfeeling ?

HESTER. Of course not, Hector, how could he think so ?

HECTOR (*raising glass*). I can only say, in the most profound meaning of the phrase—Here's luck !

JOHN. I can catch the—what is it—5.30 ?

HECTOR (*dropping his glass and whipping out his timetable*). Just a moment. 5.29, isn't it ?

HESTER. It seems so hopeless.

JOHN. Good God ! What else can I do ? Must do something.

HECTOR (*proudly*). 5.29, I thought so.

HESTER. Suppose you find them together?

JOHN. I'll break his damned neck for him.

HESTER. No, no, John, nothing rash.

HECTOR (*still on the 5.29*). John was speaking metaphorically, dear.

HESTER. Hadn't Hector better go with you?

HECTOR. I am at your service, my dear fellow. Very fortunate that it has all happened at a week-end. There are no rival claims of business. The 5.29 runs in at——

JOHN. No, no, I can't bother Hector.

HECTOR. It would be a pleasure—a melancholy pleasure. I shall engage Horace Meldrum in conversation, while you——

JOHN. While I break his neck.

HECTOR. I was going to say, "While you reason with Ariadne." . . . Runs in at. . . .

JOHN. Put it how you like. Only for God's sake come on.

(*He takes HECTOR's arm and marches him to the door.*

The door opens and ARIADNE comes in. JOHN and HECTOR draw back in amazement.)

JOHN (*carried away for the moment*). Ariadne! My darling!

ARIADNE. John!

HECTOR. Well, well, well!

JOHN (*sternly, remembering that he is an injured husband*). Where have you been?

HECTOR. You may well ask!

ARIADNE. Running away from you, John.

JOHN. Then what are you doing here now?

ARIADNE. I have come back to you, John. (*She sits down.*)

JOHN (*angry at the fright he has had*). It was just a joke, was it, your letter?

HECTOR. A joke in very doubtful taste. In more than doubtful taste.

HESTER. If it *was* a joke.

ARIADNE (*looking at them*). You have shown them my letter?

HECTOR. We know all.

JOHN. What could I—they were here. Do you think I can read a letter like that, and put it calmly in my pocket, as if nothing had happened?

ARIADNE. No, no, of course not, dear.

HESTER. Dear!

HECTOR. Have you any right to call him “dear,” that is the question.

ARIADNE (*reproachfully*). I only ran away this morning, Hector.

HECTOR. True, true. Nothing could have—— Quite so, quite so.

JOHN. You *have* been to London?

ARIADNE. Yes.

JOHN. And why have you come back now?

ARIADNE. He missed his train.

JOHN. Who?

ARIADNE. The gentleman I was running away with.

HECTOR. Meldrum. My old friend Horace Meldrum.

JOHN (*fiercely*). Was it Meldrum? Where is Meldrum?

ARIADNE. He missed his train.

JOHN. What do you mean? You say here in your letter—— (*He turns it over, trying to find the place.*)

ARIADNE. Let me find it for you, dear.

JOHN (*refusing her offer*). Here it is. “Horace and I,” that’s Meldrum?

ARIADNE. Of course. (*Surprised*) You haven’t any other friends called Horace?

HECTOR. The very point I made. Do you remember, Hester?

JOHN. "Horace and I are going into the unknown together. Do not try to follow us."

ARIADNE. Yes, that's right.

JOHN. Well?

ARIADNE. Darling, I keep telling you. He missed his train. The 12.5.

HECTOR (*as if he now understood it all*). The 12.5. Ah! (*He nods his head solemnly. A dangerous train.*)

JOHN. But I don't see——

ARIADNE. When you arrange to go into the unknown with a woman by a certain train, you can't just go and miss the train. It's so careless.

HESTER. You could have gone by the next.

ARIADNE (*carelessly*). I expect he did. I daresay he is searching London for me now. . . . Ring the bell, Hector, will you? I am dying for some tea.

HECTOR (*indignantly*). Tea! (*But he rings the bell.*)

ARIADNE (*sweetly*). I've been going backwards and forwards all day.

JOHN. I am afraid I am still very stupid. Meldrum, as I understand it, was to have gone with you to London by the 12.5 train?

ARIADNE. No, no. I had gone by the 10.15. He was to come up later and call for me at my club.

HECTOR. Her club. You see, Hester, we were right to make that the starting-point.

JOHN. And he was coming up by the 12.5?

ARIADNE. Yes. Only he missed it.

HECTOR. Presumably he was detained by some business——

ARIADNE. Presumably. (*Enter MARY.*) Tea, please, Mary. (*To them all*) Have you had any?

HESTER. Is it likely?

HECTOR. Tsss! (*He indicates the maid.*)

ARIADNE. You waited for me. How nice of you !
Tea for four.

MARY. Yes, madam. [*She goes out.*]

ARIADNE. I am sorry, dear. You were saying that Horace was probably detained by business.

JOHN. Well ?

ARIADNE. Well, you see, if a man is detained by business when you are going to watch a cricket match with him, that doesn't matter so much, but if he is detained by business when you are running away with him—well, ask Hester.

HECTOR. My dear lady !

HESTER (*coldly*). I have never run away from my husband.

ARIADNE. But you must often have wanted to. I am sorry, Hector, but—*any* husband. . . . (*To* HESTER) How would you feel if just as you had worked yourself up to it, you got a telegram "Missed train." Just like that. "Missed train." It's so—so uncomplimentary. Wouldn't you feel that if he had really loved you, he would have run the whole way to London *behind* the train, rather than waste a moment sending telegrams ?

JOHN. That's absurd.

ARIADNE. Oh, of course, if you are going to stand up for him——

JOHN (*indignantly*). I am doing nothing of the sort ! I merely say——

ARIADNE. And I merely say that when you are running away with a woman it's an insult to her to miss the train.

HECTOR. He might have only *just* missed it.

ARIADNE. Then he should have taken a special, shouldn't he, Hester ?

HESTER (*unwillingly*). Well, certainly, it would have shown a more——

ARIADNE. There you are ! Hester feels just as I do.

HESTER (*indignantly*). I feel nothing of the sort !

ARIADNE (*coaxingly*). A little bit.

HECTOR. A special ! Do you know how much a special costs ?

ARIADNE. Ah, now we're talking ! How much does a special cost, John ?

JOHN (*absently*). Fifty pounds ? (*Furiously*) I don't know ! (*This is not in the least how he had meant the scene to go.*)

ARIADNE. I thought solicitors knew all those things.

HECTOR. Every penny of fifty pounds !

ARIADNE. And what am I worth ? About twenty ? Oh, ridiculous of him to have taken a special ! Most unbusiness-like. Ariadne's one thing, but fifty pounds !

JOHN (*now entirely lost*). Really ! I don't think——

HECTOR (*warningly*). Tsss ! (*MARY comes in to prepare the tea. HECTOR becomes tactful.*) You came back by the 3.10, I suppose ? Did you have a good day's shopping ?

ARIADNE (*smiling to herself*). I did all I wanted.

HESTER. Such a good train, the 3.10.

HECTOR. I always say it's the best down train we have.

ARIADNE. I say it a good deal, but not so often as that.

HECTOR. Excellent train, don't you think so, John ?

ARIADNE. The 12.5 is a very good train *up* to London—if you can catch it.

HECTOR (*uncomfortably*). Quite so, quite so.

(*MARY has now gone.*)

ARIADNE. Let's see, where were we ?

HESTER. She'll be coming in again directly with the tea.

ARIADNE. What shall we do ? Go on talking about trains till she comes in and goes out again, or go on now, and then get back to the trains when——

JOHN (*sharply*). What do the servants know? What did you say to them when you went off this morning?

ARIADNE. Just that I was going up to London to do a little shopping.

HECTOR. Ah! the very impression I was endeavouring to give Mary just now.

JOHN. Shopping with a dressing-case?

ARIADNE. Well, I might have been taking a dress up to be cleaned or something. Mightn't I, Hester?

HESTER. They wouldn't have guessed anything yet. But servants always know the sort of woman you are. You can never hide *that* from them.

ARIADNE. Only from husbands.

JOHN. Well, if they don't know, that's something to start with. I was afraid——

HECTOR (*always ready*). Tsss!

MARY comes in with the tea.

ARIADNE (*with an air*). I went up by the 10.15. Another good train.

HECTOR. I always say that the few trains we have are *good*. Only what we want is *more*. Quantity as well as quality.

ARIADNE. How true!

HECTOR. When you get into Parliament, John, you'll have to see to that.

ARIADNE. Thank you, Mary.

[MARY goes out.

Now then, we're quite safe unless somebody comes and calls. Perhaps I had better tell Mary that I am not at home?

JOHN (*impatiently*). Nobody will call. The position then is this: you had arranged to go off with Meldrum. You were to go first, and he was to follow you by a certain train?

ARIADNE. Yes, dear. Tea, Hester?

JOHN (*violently*). Oh, damn the tea! Tea, tea, tea! How can we settle anything when you're always talking about tea?

ARIADNE (*soothingly*). The sooner we start drinking it, the sooner we shall stop talking about it. Hester?

HESTER (*haughtily*). No, thank you.

ARIADNE (*coldly*). Hector, pass Hester a bun.

HESTER. I don't want anything, thank you.

ARIADNE. Hector? You do, don't you?

HECTOR (*taking a cup*). Thank you. After all, it's a stimulant. One wants to keep a very clear head. (*He takes a bun—another stimulant.*)

ARIADNE. Did you say you wouldn't have any, John?

JOHN (*gruffly*). No, thank you.

ARIADNE (*pouring herself a cup*). There! Now, then, where were we? Oh, yes—I was to go first and he was to follow me by a certain train. That's right.

JOHN. And he didn't follow you?

ARIADNE. Not by that train.

HECTOR. Let me see, if he missed the 12.5, he'd probably catch the—— (*Out comes the time-table*) Now, then.

HESTER. What does it matter what train he went by?

HECTOR (*turning the pages rapidly with a moistened finger*). In a case like this nothing is immaterial.

JOHN. Well, then, you got a telegram at your club saying that he'd missed his train.

ARIADNE. And was coming by the next. (*Taking a telegram from her bag*) Here it is.

JOHN. Ah! (*He reads it.*)

HECTOR. May I? (*He takes it and reads*) Ah! Handed in at Melchester Central, 12.20. Received Knightsbridge, 12.38. "Missed train. Expect me at three. Horace."

JOHN. And what did you do ?

HECTOR. One moment, dear boy. (*Returning to timetable*) He would catch the 1.17. Runs into town—runs into town—— (*He turns a page.*)

JOHN (*his temper rising*). And what did you do, when you read the telegram ?

ARIADNE. Came home again.

HECTOR. Change at West Hutton. I knew it wasn't a good train. Yes, he ought to have caught the 12.5.

ARIADNE. He ought. That's what I keep saying.

JOHN (*sarcastically*). And as he didn't, you have decided that you don't want to go into the unknown with him after all ?

ARIADNE. No. It would be so very unknown if he kept on missing trains.

JOHN. Whereupon you come coolly back here, as if nothing had happened, and order tea ?

ARIADNE. I was too excited to have lunch. Thinking of him.

JOHN. And now what do you propose to do ?

ARIADNE (*at last saying the right thing*). Wait to hear what you propose to do with me, John.

JOHN. Ah !

HECTOR. Exactly. Now we are getting to grips with the problem. To take the possibilities. Divorce.

JOHN (*staggered*). Divorce ?

HESTER. Rubbish !

HECTOR (*with dignity*). Divorce, I was about to say, is impossible.

ARIADNE. Not impossible, but very bad for business.

JOHN (*sharply*). Why not impossible ?

ARIADNE. John ! And you a solicitor ! Is anything impossible to a really good solicitor ? Think of me in the witness box ! How your counsel would rend me ! I wonder who you would brief.

HESTER. It's absurd, anyway. We don't want a divorce in the family.

ARIADNE. Of course we don't.

HECTOR. So be it. We rule out divorce and come to the second alternative. Separation. Judicial or otherwise.

ARIADNE (*shaking her head*). So expensive.

HECTOR. What would a separation figure out at, John, all told?

(*It is as much as JOHN can do not to shriek.*)

ARIADNE. I was thinking of the expense afterwards. It would mean two establishments for John. Even as it is, with me helping him by making love to his clients, we can only just keep this one going. Isn't it so, John? (*But at this JOHN gives way altogether.*)

JOHN (*shouting*). What do you want? What do you think is going to happen? Do you think you can come back here——

HECTOR (*always helpful*). The past blotted out——

JOHN. Do you think you can go off as you please.

HECTOR (*still helping*). Here to-day and gone to-morrow.

JOHN. Do you think you can just go away and come back when you like——

HECTOR (*explanatorily*). Without so much as a with-your-leave or a by-your-leave——

JOHN (*swinging round on HECTOR*). Shut up!

HESTER (*appalled*). John!

ARIADNE (*gleefully to herself*). He's angry!

JOHN (*still shouting*). Why do you come interfering? Can't I manage my own affairs? You keep talking and talking and talking——

HECTOR. My dear John!

JOHN. I can't say anything, but what you must say something——

HECTOR. I am dumbfounded.

JOHN (*almost crying*). Why can't you leave me alone? She's my wife, isn't she?

ARIADNE (*under her breath*). Well done!

HECTOR (*to the world*). I am absolutely at a loss! In this very distressing business I am merely putting my brains, such as they are, at your disposal. And *this* happens! I am absolutely at a loss!

HESTER (*hurrying to her wounded husband's aid*). After all, John, you asked for our advice——

HECTOR. You took us into your confidence——

HESTER (*stroking her wounded husband's head*). Hector only wants to help.

HECTOR (*sadly*). It is beyond me. I am out of my depth.

ARIADNE (*recalling JOHN to the present*). Dear, Hector is out of his depth.

JOHN (*ashamed of himself*). I am sorry, Hector. (*He holds out his hand which HECTOR shakes heartily.*)

HECTOR (*happily, the perfect gentleman*). Say no more, my dear fellow! An apology—between friends——

JOHN (*opening the door*). Would you mind? Forgive me, Hester. (*HESTER gets up and he shakes her hand.*) I think perhaps Ariadne and I—— It was very kind of you to—— Perhaps to-morrow we may—— Of course you won't say anything until——

(*He has got them to the door.*)

HESTER. That's all right, John.

HECTOR (*vaguely*). An apology—between friends. (*Under his breath to HESTER*) My dear, do we—— (*He indicates saying good-bye to ARIADNE*) No? Doubtful taste, perhaps. Perhaps better not. Quite so.

(*JOHN takes them out. While he is away ARIADNE touches herself up in front of the glass and comes back to her tea.*)

JOHN (*as he comes back*) Damn that fellow!

ARIADNE. Hector? Such a nice man.

JOHN. Gas-bag.

ARIADNE. It's your brother-in-law. Your own sister's husband, and making lots of money. You can't call a man like that a gas-bag.

JOHN. Never mind that. (*Firmly. A husband and a solicitor*) Now then, Ariadne.

ARIADNE. Yes, John.

JOHN. I want some explanation of this. Why did you go away with that fellow?

ARIADNE. You told me to be nice to him.

JOHN (*to Heaven*). Nice to him!

ARIADNE. Yes, it was the nicest thing I could think of.

JOHN. And when your husband asks you to be friendly to a man who is a good client of his, that's how you do it.

ARIADNE. Yes. When they don't miss their train.

JOHN. Well!

ARIADNE (*anxiously*). You don't think I was too friendly? I had to think of the business, and he's such a very important client, isn't he?

JOHN. Look here, if you think that by ridiculous exaggeration of my words like that——

ARIADNE. Don't sneer at exaggeration. All art is exaggeration. It isn't until you look at a thing a little out of its perspective that you see it as it really is.

JOHN. I don't want a lecture on art.

ARIADNE. No, John. And it means using such long words. But I want you to understand that my heart was in the right place if—if the rest of me wasn't. I overdid the faithful wife, that's all.

JOHN. *Faithful* wife! You have a sense of humour, Ariadne.

ARIADNE. I have, John. Nothing can take that from me.

JOHN (*suddenly*). I don't believe a word you've been

saying. You ran away with him because you loved him. (*She says nothing. He goes over to her and shakes her by the shoulders.*) Answer! Do you love this fellow?

ARIADNE. Why do you call him a fellow? Only yesterday you were telling me what a good sort he was.

JOHN (*to himself*). Meldrum! Good God! How little one knows one's friends! That sort of man!

ARIADNE. But I told you yesterday he was that sort of man.

JOHN. God! I'll break his neck for him.

ARIADNE (*interested*). Is that legal?

JOHN (*grimly*). I'll—break—his—neck for him.

ARIADNE. Is it businesslike? Of course you'd have the winding up of the estate——

JOHN. If he thinks he can try any of those games in this house——

ARIADNE. Isn't it funny? Yesterday you liked him and I didn't, and to-day you don't like him and I——

JOHN (*turning to her suddenly*). Supposing he had caught that train! Where would you be now?

ARIADNE. Ah, but he didn't. He was detained by business. Business first.

JOHN (*melodramatically*). In all but actual fact you are unfaithful to me!

ARIADNE. Ah, but facts are what count in this hard-headed town.

JOHN. But for the trifling accident of missing a train——

ARIADNE (*excusing him*). I suppose he is very busy just now.

JOHN (*the husband forgotten in the solicitor*). Those new houses. I told you.

ARIADNE. I suppose he suddenly decided that they could be run up for less or that they didn't really want bathrooms. I must ask him what it was.

JOHN (*the husband roused*). You'll do nothing of the sort! I'll take damned good care you never see him again.

ARIADNE. Darling, is that wise?

JOHN. What do you mean?

ARIADNE. We don't want to offend him, do we?

JOHN. Offend! That's funny! That's very funny!
(*He laughs bitterly.*)

ARIADNE. Yes, dear, but we mustn't let our sense of humour interfere with our sense of business.

JOHN (*very sarcastic*). He hasn't offended *me*. Oh no! He has only run away with my wife.

ARIADNE. But you must save something from the wreck. You don't want to lose a wife *and* a good client on the same day.

JOHN (*now entirely unmanned*). Damn my clients!

ARIADNE. John, you're losing your head. You're saying things you'll be sorry for one day.

JOHN (*violently*). And you're saying things *you'll* be sorry for. And what's more, my girl, you'll be sorry for them now. I tell you I've had about enough of this.
(*He goes up to her fiercely*) You shame me in front of my relations, you insult me, you ruin my business for me, you——

ARIADNE (*triumphantly*). Ah ha! I knew that would come in. Business! Business!

JOHN (*seizing her wrists*). Stop it, do you hear? Stop it, or by God, I'll——

(*The door opens very quietly and HECTOR creeps in.*)

HECTOR (*in a stage whisper*). It's all right, I'm not staying. I just—— Did I leave a small pine—ah, there it is. Thank you, thank you.

(*He picks up his pineapple and tip-toes softly out of the room.*)

ACT III

Monday. ARIADNE is alone in the drawing-room, reading.

MARY is clearing away tea. The front door bell rings.

ARIADNE. I am at home to anybody, Mary. From the Mayor downwards—(*after thought*)—upwards—(*after further thought*)—downwards.

MARY. Yes, madam.

(*She goes out, leaving the door open. In a little while HECTOR's voice is heard booming.*)

HECTOR'S VOICE. Ah, Mary! Is Mr. Winter in? I just dropped in on my way next door. . . . (*MARY's voice is not heard.*) . . . Ah! No, I think perhaps No, it was your master I particularly wished—in the circumstances perhaps hardly—— Thank you, thank you.

(*He goes. MARY comes back.*)

MARY. It was Mr. Chadwick, madam. He said——

ARIADNE (*smiling*). I heard him, Mary. He talks very clearly.

MARY. Thank you, madam.

[*She goes out.*

(*ARIADNE returns to her book.*)

ARIADNE (*to herself*). Cut by Hector. (*JOHN comes in, evening paper in hand. She jumps up*) Darling! (*JOHN takes no notice.*) Cut—by John. (*She goes back to the sofa and picks up her book*) And now I've lost the place. That comes of being impetuous. (*JOHN*

settles down with the paper.) Did you see Hector? (JOHN *grunts.*) Yes or no, as the case may be. . . . He's just gone out. . . . He's coming back again. . . . (*After a long pause*) How delightful.

JOHN (*sulkily*). What?

ARIADNE. Oh, nothing. (*After a pause*) Anything in the paper?

JOHN. No.

ARIADNE. Nothing in the paper. (*After a pause*) Did you have a good day?

JOHN. H'm.

ARIADNE. A good day. Now what shall I say next? (*Brightly, after a pause*) I'm reading a book about bees.

JOHN. H'm.

ARIADNE. What a mercy! I've found a subject which interests him. . . . It says in my book about bees that when the queen bee has finished with her husband she kills him. Did you know that? It's a funny idea, isn't it? You'd have thought that she'd have kept him to talk to her in the evenings. It must be so lonely for her without anybody.

JOHN. H'm.

ARIADNE. He isn't as fascinated as I thought. (*After a pause*) I wish I had been married to Hector. Whatever his faults, nobody can say that he doesn't talk.

JOHN (*rudely*). And nobody can say that his wife ran away from him.

ARIADNE (*sweetly*). Oh, is *that* what it is? I knew there was something the matter.

JOHN (*throwing down his paper*). What do you expect me to do? Thank you for coming back to me, and then chatter away gaily as though nothing had happened?

ARIADNE. No, but I think that, after two days of

completely silent thought, you ought to do *something*. What *are* you going to do, John?

JOHN (*mumbling*). Haven't decided.

ARIADNE. Would you like me to go away for a few days until you *have* decided?

JOHN (*brutally*). With whom?

ARIADNE. Oh, John! (*She shakes her head at him.*)

JOHN (*angrily*). Why do you make me say things like that? I was just reading my paper—and then you make me say horrible things like that. What do you expect me to do? I've tried to see Meldrum, I keep on trying to see Meldrum, but if he's away, what can I do?

ARIADNE (*surprised*). Away?

JOHN. Of course he's away. At least he's never at home or at his office when I go to see him.

ARIADNE (*eagerly*). What are you going to say to him?

JOHN. Tell him that, if I see him inside my house again, I'll knock his head off.

ARIADNE. John! My darling! (*She goes to him and puts her arms round his neck.*)

JOHN. Go away! (*He tries to unloose her arms.*)

ARIADNE. And you are prepared to lose all his business?

JOHN (*bravely*). If necessary.

ARIADNE (*admiringly*). John!

JOHN (*hopefully*). It may not come to that, of course.

ARIADNE. But it must!

JOHN (*uncomfortably*). My dear child, you can't let sentiment interfere with business. No business man does. If it's convenient to Meldrum that I should continue to act for him, naturally he will want me to.

ARIADNE. And naturally you will?

JOHN. Naturally.

ARIADNE (*leaving him*). I think I shall go on with my book about bees.

Enter MARY.

MARY. Miss Ingleby is at the door and wants to know if you're engaged, madam.

ARIADNE. Oh no, ask her in, Mary.

MARY. Yes, madam. [*She goes out.*]

ARIADNE. You'd better pretend you're busy, hadn't you, dear? Janet would know at once that you didn't love me any more.

JOHN (*sulkily*). Right.

[*He goes out and is heard speaking to JANET.*]

JOHN (*outside*). How are you? You'll find Ariadne in there. I've got one or two letters to write.

JANET. Thanks. (*She comes in.*)

ARIADNE. Good evening, dear. I suppose you've had tea.

JANET. Oh, Lord, yes, ages ago. (*She sits down.*) I rather want your advice, that's why I came.

ARIADNE. Well, as long as you promise not to take it——

JANET. That's something about you that makes you different from most of the people here.

ARIADNE. I suppose Hector would think it uncivic of me to take that as a compliment.

JANET. Well, anyway, I'll tell you what's happened; though, I know pretty well what you'll say.

ARIADNE. How disappointing of you! . . . Go ahead. (*Tucking them away*) I'm all ears.

JANET. Well, I went to London on Saturday.

ARIADNE. London! On Saturday! Fancy!

JANET. To have lunch with some friends. I was coming back by that 5 train——

ARIADNE. I know. It isn't a very good one.

JANET. How funny! That was just what Horace Meldrum said.

ARIADNE (*surprised*). Horace Meldrum? When?

JANET. When he saw me catching it.

ARIADNE (*impossibly*). Oh, did *he* go to London on Saturday?

JANET. He had to run up to see a man about something.

ARIADNE. Oh, I see.

JANET. We were both catching the 5 train back.

ARIADNE. Fancy! So *he* was coming back too?

JANET. Well, he was at the station anyway.

ARIADNE. Looking for somebody perhaps.

JANET. Well, anyhow we met just outside the platform, and naturally we got talking, and he said that the best train of the day was the 10.45.

ARIADNE. Yes, I've heard that very well spoken of.

JANET. And he thought it would be rather fun if we had dinner somewhere and came back by that train together.

ARIADNE. He likes a little bit of fun, I know.

JANET. I thought it would be rather fun, too. So we did.

ARIADNE (*anxiously*). He didn't mention any—better trains?

JANET. No, that was the best.

ARIADNE. And you caught it?

JANET. Yes.

ARIADNE (*with a sigh of relief*). Then what do you want my advice about?

JANET. Well, I'm telling you.

ARIADNE. Sorry.

JANET. He got a bit wuzzy at dinner—well, I don't mind that, I've seen a bit of it in my time.

ARIADNE. However old are you? A hundred and one?

JANET. When I say wuzzy, I don't mean—well, he could have driven a car all right. I mean fond of himself—and of me—and of the waiters—you know.

ARIADNE. I know.

JANET. And in the train—we had a carriage to ourselves——

ARIADNE. Really? First class, I suppose?

JANET. Yes, and the guard was a friend of his.

ARIADNE. Mr. Meldrum has a great many friends in the guards.

JANET. Well, in the train——

ARIADNE. I suppose he kissed you.

JANET. Well, of course! You don't think I am making a song about that, do you?

ARIADNE. I'm sorry, go on.

JANET. Well, in the train he asked me to marry him.

ARIADNE (*awed*). Janet, I wish I could have heard him.

JANET. It *was* rather funny. He asked me to share his little nest, and things like that. Well, I told him that I couldn't say off-hand, and he said "That's right, little woman, you think it over." But he's been practically living with us since, talking business with Father, and *he* thinks it's settled, and Father thinks it's settled, and——

ARIADNE. And Janet?

JANET. Janet isn't quite certain. Because, you see, there's a lot to be said on both sides.

ARIADNE. I see. And which side do you want *me* to say it on?

JANET. I know what *you'll* say—you'll say, "Of course you mustn't."

ARIADNE (*indignantly*). I shan't say anything of the sort.

JANET. You're a bit old-fashioned in some ways. Don't you think so?

ARIADNE. I'm trying not to be.

JANET. I feel that at any moment you'll ask me if I'm in *love* with Horace.

ARIADNE. My dear child—I mean, my dear elderly friend, how could I ask you anything so ridiculous?

JANET. Mind you, I'm not saying that I have no use for love: But what I feel is that love and marriage are two different things.

ARIADNE. They are sometimes, of course.

JANET. Well, look round a bit, at all the married couples you know. How many of them are in love with each other? Are the Chadwicks?

ARIADNE (*twinkling*). You must ask Hector one day—when I'm there.

JANET (*suddenly*). I'll ask somebody else. Are you and John?

ARIADNE. Oh, my dear! How embarrassing of you!

JANET. Well, tell me.

ARIADNE (*after a pause*). I think so, Janet. . . . In our hearts. . . . It gets covered up from time to time with business, and domestic worries, and other things, but I think it's there.

JANET (*a little taken aback*). Oh!

ARIADNE. That's what makes marriage such terrible fun. Trying to keep it. Trying to find it again. The other thing is so ridiculously easy. Any fool can get married, and throw her hand in.

JANET. Y-yes.

ARIADNE. You and I are much too good for that, Janet. We're in a different class. Any brainless little fluffty girl can marry, and fall in love with somebody else, and be fallen in love with. It takes a real woman to keep marriage intact. . . . *You* could do it. . . . And it *is* such fun. But you must have the right husband to start with. . . . Oh yes, John and I are all right. . . .

really . . . though perhaps he doesn't know it just at this moment.

JANET (*thoughtfully*). I felt perhaps it was a bit cheap.

ARIADNE. Cheap . . . yes. . . . Free love—and free verse. They may be better, but—(*with a smile*)—but they're a damn sight easier. I like difficult things. (*There is a short silence.*)

JANET (*getting up slowly*). Yes. Horace is too easy.

ARIADNE. Much.

JANET. Thanks, Ariadne.

ARIADNE. Do something for me.

JANET. Of course.

ARIADNE (*smiling to herself*). Let him think—for to-day anyhow—that it *is* settled.

JANET. My dear, it will take me more than a day to persuade him that it isn't.

ARIADNE. And it really isn't?

JANET. It isn't. Horace is off. . . . Charlie was off. . . . I suppose I shall find somebody one day.

ARIADNE. Why not find a job of work to do while you're looking round?

JANET (*struck by the novelty of it*). Good idea! I will. So long. (*She goes . . . wondering what she could do.*)

(*Left alone, ARIADNE waits until JANET is out of the house, and then opens the door and calls across to JOHN's study.*)

ARIADNE. John! . . . John. . . . It's all right, Janet has gone. We can resume our silence from where we left off. . . . Bother! (*She wanders round the room in an undecided way, and then goes back to the sofa and picks up her book.*) I suppose it will have to be bees again.

Enter MARY.

MARY. Oh, Mr. Meldrum rang up, madam, while you were engaged with Miss Ingleby. I couldn't quite

catch whether it was Mr. or Mrs. Winter he was asking for. He just wanted to know if you was in.

ARIADNE (*hopefully*). Yes, Mary?

MARY. He was coming round, I understood him to say, madam. I think the master has gone up to dress. I think I heard him going into the bathroom.

(*The front door bell rings.*)

ARIADNE. Oh! Well, you'd better show Mr. Meldrum in here in case it's very urgent business.

MARY. Yes, madam, I think that's him now.

ARIADNE. Very well, Mary. (MARY *goes out and ARIADNE smiles to herself on the sofa.*) Dear Horace!

MARY (*announcing*). Mr. Meldrum.

• HORACE *comes in.*

HORACE (*advancing airily, hand extended*). Ah, dear lady, I just looked round to say how sorry I was——

ARIADNE (*rising dramatically*). Horace!

HORACE (*less airily*). How sorry I was our little luncheon fell through——

ARIADNE. My darling!

HORACE (*startled*). Eh?

ARIADNE. I was afraid something had happened to you.

HORACE. Oh no, no, no. A little bit of business turned up. You know how it does. And I said to myself, "Mrs. John is a sensible woman, she'll understand how it is when a little bit of business turns up. She'll let me off that little bit of lunch I promised her." But I thought I'd just come round—only polite——

ARIADNE (*bewildered*). Horace!

HORACE. What's the matter?

ARIADNE. Ah, I understand. How tactful of you.

But you can speak quite safely now. We are alone. My husband is upstairs having a bath. Darling!

HORACE. I—I—I—Really!

ARIADNE. As if business would have kept you away from me! What was it, dear? You had an accident? You fell down?

HORACE. Really, Mrs. Winter, I don't quite—I think you must have made—— (*He breaks off, not knowing what to say.*)

ARIADNE. Ah, but never mind! We are all right now.

HORACE (*mechanically*). All right now.

ARIADNE. Quite sure?

HORACE. Quite sure.

ARIADNE. Then when do we start?

HORACE. When do we——?

ARIADNE. When do we start?

HORACE (*mechanically*). Start.

ARIADNE. Yes, start.

HORACE. Start where?

ARIADNE. That's for you to say, Horace. What about Spain?

HORACE. Spain?

ARIADNE. Yes, Spain.

HORACE (*mechanically*). Spain. . . . Spain. . . . Spain. . . . Spain. . . .

ARIADNE. Spain—until it's all blown over.

HORACE. Spain until it's all blown over. . . . (*With an effort*) My dear lady, I—I don't know what you're talking about.

ARIADNE (*horrified*). Horace!

HORACE. I don't know what you're talking about.

ARIADNE. Have I made a terrible mistake?

HORACE (*seeming to find some comfort in the phrase*). I don't know what you're talking about.

ARIADNE. You did ask me to come away with you ?

HORACE. I don't know what——

ARIADNE. To leave my husband and come away with you ?

HORACE (*with energy*). Never ! Never ! Never ! Never !

ARIADNE. Not on that Friday night when I wore your rose ?

HORACE. Never !

ARIADNE. And you wore mine ?

HORACE. Never !

ARIADNE. We *are* thinking of the same Friday ? I mean this last one.

HORACE. Never thought of such a thing. Never entered my head.

ARIADNE (*wrinkling her forehead*). I'm sure you said *something*.

HORACE (*awkwardly*). Just a little bit of lunch—I don't say I didn't suggest a little bit of lunch. What's the harm in that ?

ARIADNE. Was that really all ?

HORACE. Absolutely all, 'pon my honour.

ARIADNE. Oh ! How awful !

HORACE. Awful ? What's awful ?

ARIADNE. What have I done ?

HORACE. What *have* you done ?

ARIADNE. Why, you see, I left a note for John.

HORACE (*faintly*). You left what ?

ARIADNE. You see, I misunderstood you, and I left a note for John saying we were going away together.

HORACE. But—but—but——

ARIADNE. And then you didn't meet me as we arranged, and I thought you must have had some terrible accident, so I hurried back here to wait until you were well again.

HORACE (*anxiously*). Yes, but what about the note?

ARIADNE. It was too late. John had read it.

HORACE. But—but—but—my dear lady—

ARIADNE. Wasn't it a pity?

HORACE. But wha—wha—what did it say?

ARIADNE. Oh, just that you and I were going away together, and he wasn't to follow us. I didn't say anything about Spain, because I wasn't quite sure.

HORACE. Well, of all the—well, of all the—well, of all the—

ARIADNE (*penitently*). I was hasty, I see that now. But what are we going to do?

HORACE. What's *he* going to do, that's the point?

ARIADNE. Do you mean John?

HORACE (*anxiously*). What's he been doing these last two days?

ARIADNE (*simply*). Waiting for *you*, Horace.

HORACE (*nervously*). How do you mean, waiting for me?

ARIADNE. Just waiting for you. I think he wants to speak to you.

HORACE (*hopefully*). Ah, yes, yes. Perhaps that's it. There *is* a little matter of business between us—

ARIADNE. This wasn't business, Horace. He talked as though it would be a pleasure. He's been looking for you everywhere.

HORACE. What do you think he's going to say?

ARIADNE. He didn't tell me. All he *said* was that he was going to break your neck for you.

HORACE (*in alarm*). But—but—but—but—but—

ARIADNE. But I suppose he'll say, "Ah, Meldrum, here you are," first.

HORACE. But—but—but I've just fixed things up with old Ingleby. Little Miss Janet and I—well, but that shows how ridiculous the whole thing is. I'm marrying Miss Ingleby.

ARIADNE (*reproachfully*). Not with a broken neck!

HORACE (*anxiously*). But look here, my dear lady, you must explain. Tell him the whole thing was a horrible mistake.

ARIADNE. Oh, I shall. In fact I'm sure he'll feel it for himself. He'll look down at the body and say, "Yes, it was a mistake. I oughtn't to have done it." And I shall say, "I told you so, John. You see, we've got nowhere to put it." And he'll say, "What about the cellar?" and I shall say, "It's much too big for the cellar," and he will say—— (*But the sight of HORACE's face is too much for her. Weakly she adds*) And he will say—— (*and then breaks down altogether, and laughs hysterically*).

HORACE (*anxiously*). There, there, my dear lady! (*He tries to pat her back. She naves him away, and goes on laughing.*) There! there! . . . There! there! . . . Try holding the breath . . . there, there!

ARIADNE (*shaking her head at him*). Oh, Mr. Meldrum! (*She laughs again.*)

HORACE (*with sudden relief*). You were joking? Of course! That's it! You were just joking about John and the letter you left for him! You haven't told him anything. Of course you haven't.

ARIADNE (*still rather weak*). Oh, Mr. Meldrum!

HORACE (*anxious again*). What? Wasn't it——

ARIADNE. And the poor man actually thought I was attracted by him!

HORACE (*indignantly*). What?

ARIADNE. He thought I wanted to share a first-class carriage with him!

HORACE. Who?

ARIADNE. Have a little bit of lunch with him—a little bit of dinner with him—in pink muslin!

HORACE (*utterly undone*). Well, I'm damned!

ARIADNE. Catch the last train with him! Good gracious, the man even thought I wanted to *miss* the last train with him! With *him*! (*She points to him, and goes off into laughter again.*)

HORACE. Well, upon my word—

ARIADNE. Oh, Mr. Meldrum, you funny, funny man!

HORACE (*hardly able to believe it*). You mean to tell me that you were pulling my leg from the word "Go"?

ARIADNE (*weakly*). Yes. At least, from the word "nesting."

HORACE. You've just been making a fool of me?

ARIADNE. No, no. Looking on while you made a fool of yourself.

HORACE. Well, upon my soul! (*He stares at her in wonderment.*)

ARIADNE. You really mustn't make love to married women, you know. You haven't got the figure for it. I'm not sure that you ought to make love to anybody.

HORACE. Fooled me! Fooled poor old Horace Meldrum!

ARIADNE. From the word muslin.

HORACE (*gazing at her in admiration*). You are a little devil!

ARIADNE. But then you like them to show a bit of spirit, don't you?

HORACE. By gad, I do! To think that a bit of a woman like you—

ARIADNE. Oh, I'm rather more than that. I'm almost all of it.

HORACE (*beginning to laugh reminiscently*). Right from the beginning! Poor old Horace bringing round his flowers . . . poor old Horace arranging his little bit of dinner. . . . Why, I'd actually telephoned for a table—what do you think of that? At least my clerk had. . . . Well, well, well—and you were fooling me all the

time ! Fooling poor old Horace Meldrum ! What the boys would say if they knew ! Ha, ha, ha ! (*He goes off into happy laughter.*)

ARIADNE. It is funny, isn't it ? (*She laughs too.*)

HORACE (*rolling with laughter*). The way you kept it up !

ARIADNE. If you could have seen your face !

HORACE. Fooled by a woman ! Ha, ha, ha !

JOHN (*outside*). Is that Meldrum ?

HORACE (*still laughing weakly—his back to the door*). And of course *he's* in the joke too ! Ha, ha, ha !

(*JOHN comes down the stairs two at a time, and bursts in, in his shirt sleeves, his coat in his hand.*)

JOHN (*fiercely*). Ah, Meldrum, here you are !

HORACE (*weakly*). That's how you said he'd begin ! Ha, ha, ha. . . . Yes, John, old boy, here I am . . . oh dear, oh dear ! (*He mops at his eyes, still shaking with laughter.*)

JOHN. Stand up !

HORACE (*chuckling to ARIADNE*). He's going through with it. (*Meekly as he stands up*) Yes, John.

JOHN. Don't call me John.

HORACE. No, John. (*To ARIADNE*) And he's taken his coat off and all !

ARIADNE (*going to JOHN*). Shall I help you on, dear ?

JOHN (*to ARIADNE*). I think you had better leave us.

HORACE. That's good ! "I think you had better leave us." That's damned good. (*He chuckles.*)

ARIADNE (*helping him on*). Why, dear ?

HORACE. He's going to break my neck, Mrs. Winter. You can't do that in the presence of ladies. It isn't polite.

JOHN (*stiffly*). I wish to have a few words in private with Mr. Meldrum.

HORACE. A few words in private. Capital !

ARIADNE. As this concerns *me*, I feel that I ought to be present.

HORACE. Of course she ought. Come, come, John, you can't spoil the fun by sending her away.

JOHN (*grimly*). Fun!

HORACE (*chuckling*). As pretty a little bit of fun as ever I saw. And I like a joke. Nobody can say I don't like a joke. I like a joke with any man. (*He sinks into the sofa again.*)

JOHN. Stand up!

ARIADNE. John, he's tired.

HORACE (*getting up*). No, no, I'll play the game. You don't catch Horace Meldrum spoiling a bit of fun. . . . Do I hold my hands up? (*He winks at ARIADNE.*)

JOHN. You ran away with my wife.

HORACE. Yes, that's right. Spain.

JOHN. What?

HORACE. Spain. We were going to Spain. (*To ARIADNE*) It was Spain, wasn't it?

ARIADNE (*nodding*). Ronda.

HORACE. That's right. What she said. In Spain.

JOHN. Oh, so it was to be Spain, was it? And, but for the accident of missing your train, you would be in Spain together now?

HORACE (*murmuring to himself*). But for the accident of missing the train, Mrs. Winter and I would have been in Spain. That's good. I thought there was a bit of poetry there. (*Putting it to music*) But for the accident—

JOHN (*terrifyingly*). Answer! Is it so?

HORACE. Well, I don't know what the trains— (*hastily*) that is to say, I did look them up, of course— (*looking at his watch*)—yes, we should just about have been there now—where she said.

JOHN. And what the devil do you mean by it?

HORACE (*playing up nobly*). I can only say, as one gentleman to another, I'm sorry. (*To ARIADNE*) That's pretty good for an amateur.

JOHN. What are you saying to my wife ?

HORACE. That was what they call an "aside," old boy.

JOHN. How dare you address my wife at all ! Kindly confine your remarks to me in future.

HORACE (*chuckling*). Oh, damn good, damn good, on my soul.

JOHN (*suddenly*). What's the matter with you ? Have you been drinking ?

HORACE (*earnestly*). Not a drop, my dear fellow, not a drop since tea—well, just after tea.

JOHN. You can understand what I'm saying ?

HORACE. Perfectly. And believe me, my dear boy, I appreciate it. I didn't know you had it in you.

JOHN (*a trifle bewildered*). Then if you can understand, listen to me.

HORACE (*weakly*). Yes, John. Don't make it too difficult for me.

JOHN (*very impressively*). First : If I ever catch you in my house again, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life. Secondly : Your deeds and papers will be sent back to you to-morrow, and after that I won't soil my fingers by touching any of your dirty business again.

ARIADNE (*to herself, meaning it*). Oh, well done, John !

HORACE (*meaning something else*). Isn't he good ?

JOHN. And thirdly : If you so much as put a foot into my office again, I'll tell one of my clerks to kick you out.

HORACE (*in sheer admiration*). Marvellous, my dear fellow, marvellous. (*He chuckles to himself.*) Wonderful touch that about soiling your fingers—with *my* business !

JOHN (*to ARIADNE*). Is he mad ? What's the matter with him ?

ARIADNE. I think he thinks you're joking, dear. I think he thinks you've been joking all the time.

JOHN (*staggered*). Joking?

ARIADNE. Yes, I think that's what he thinks. I don't think he's taking you quite seriously.

JOHN (*grimly*). Oh! . . . So you think I'm joking, eh?

HORACE (*comfortably*). My dear man, I *know* you're joking.

JOHN. And how do you know that?

HORACE. Good Lord, I'm not a fool. You wouldn't be talking about business like that if you weren't joking.

ARIADNE. Ah, John, you see!

JOHN (*nettled*). I'll soon show you if I'm joking or not.

HORACE. You did it so damn well that just for a moment you almost took me in. But when you talk about throwing away good business—all the nice little jobs I've given you, and all the nice little jobs I'm going to give you—(*chuckling*) why then, bless you, I *know* you're trying to pull my leg. That's *over-acting*, my boy.

JOHN. So you think I'm joking when I say that I won't do any more business for a man who tries to run away with my wife?

HORACE. Course I do.

JOHN. Damn you, I mean it.

HORACE (*waving him down*). No, no, dear boy.

JOHN (*appealingly*). Ariadne, tell him I mean it. Tell him I'm serious.

ARIADNE. But it sounds so silly, John.

JOHN (*to HORACE*). I mean it, do you hear?

HORACE (*chuckling comfortably*). No, no, dear boy. You've put up a very good performance, but now you're getting carried away. It's going to your head. As long as you talk about breaking my neck, and thrashing

me within an inch of my life, that's all right, I say nothing against that. That's all in the character. But for a man to talk of throwing away good business, just because his wife and his best client——

JOHN (*grimly*). Now I'm going to kill you.

HORACE (*chuckling*). Ah, stick to that and you can't go wrong. That's expected of a husband. That's in the character. All I say——

JOHN (*advancing threateningly*). I shouldn't waste your breath talking. Put your hands up!

HORACE (*in an ecstasy of admiring laughter*). Oh, John, John, you'll be the death of me. You ought to have gone on the stage.

JOHN. Put them up!

HORACE (*retreating behind ARIADNE*). Keep him off, Mrs. Winter. Stop him! Oh Lord, oh Lord, I haven't laughed like this——

JOHN. Out of the way, Ariadne.

ARIADNE. What are you going to do, John?

HORACE (*between laughs*). He's going to kill me.

ARIADNE. You mustn't do that.

HORACE. He's doing it, Mrs. Winter, he's doing it. I shall never get over this.

ARIADNE. I think you had better go, Mr. Meldrum.

HORACE. Yes, yes, I'll go. Oh Lord, oh Lord! (*As he goes to the door, JOHN makes a move after him.*)

ARIADNE. John! (*JOHN stops.*) Stay here, please. I want to talk to you. (*JOHN hesitates.*) You'd better sit down. (*JOHN sits down.*) Thank you, dear. (*Coldly*) Good-bye, Mr. Meldrum.

HORACE (*at the door, still rather weak*). Good-bye, dear lady, good—— (*Suddenly recovering himself*) Why, bless my soul, I'd almost forgotten what I came about. Our little joke put it clean out of my head. (*Very business-like*) John, I want to see you to-morrow about my

marriage settlement—Janet and I have fixed things up—I arranged with old Ingleby to meet him at your office. Eleven o'clock suit you? Right. I'll tell him. So long. (*He nods to JOHN, and then slowly begins to chuckle to himself again.*) You wag! [*He goes out.*]

JOHN (*rather bewildered—after a pause*). What was that he said? Marriage settlement?

ARIADNE. Yes, dear.

JOHN. Getting married? To Janet?

ARIADNE. He thinks so.

JOHN. Then how—— But in that case he couldn't——

ARIADNE. Exactly.

JOHN (*after a pause, still puzzling it out*). He said he thought it was all a joke my being angry. Why did he think it was all a joke?

ARIADNE. Because of what you said about giving up good business.

JOHN. Ridiculous nonsense!

ARIADNE. That was what he thought.

JOHN. Why shouldn't I have given it up? Of course, to a man like Meldrum business *would* seem the only thing that mattered. But to any decent man—— (*He stops.*)

ARIADNE. To any decent man——?

JOHN (*still thinking*). But that wasn't it. Directly I came in he treated the whole thing as a joke. Why?

ARIADNE. Perhaps because I told him that the whole thing *was* a joke.

JOHN. You told him? (*He stares at her.*) Good Lord, then, you mean it wasn't true that you were going off with him?

ARIADNE (*reproachfully*). True!

JOHN. Your letter—— (*He feels in his pocket for it.*)

ARIADNE. John, did you really think I could possibly——

JOHN. But that telegram. You had made *some* sort of an arrangement with him.

ARIADNE. I might have had lunch with him if he'd caught his train. I don't know. Would you mind that? Your favourite client.

JOHN (*having found the letter*). But if it was just lunch, why do you say this about going into the unknown together.

ARIADNE. We were lunching at Frascati's.

JOHN. And that was all? Did he only suggest lunch? (*She says nothing.*) Did he?

ARIADNE (*smiling to herself*). Well, I led him on a little. Just to see how far he *would* go.

JOHN. Why? Oh, I see, to teach him a lesson.

ARIADNE. Mr. Meldrum? You can't teach *him* anything.

JOHN. Then why?

ARIADNE. Well, perhaps to teach somebody else a lesson.

JOHN (*blustering*). I can't make women out. How you could ever have thought of lunching with a man like that. But women are all the same, they never know a bounder when they see one.

ARIADNE. I suppose they don't.

JOHN. Meldrum! And Janet Ingleby is going to marry him! There you are again. Just what I say.

ARIADNE. Women *are* funny, of course.

JOHN (*still with the letter*). Oh, then there's this: "We are poles asunder, as Hector—We are poles asunder on the most vitally important thing in life." What does that mean? What is the most vitally important thing in life?

ARIADNE (*quietly*). The order in which you put things. What comes first.

JOHN (*uncomfortably*). I don't know what you mean. (*Pathetically*) God, I *have* had a rotten week-end.

ARIADNE (*sympathetically*). Have you, darling?

JOHN. I've been perfectly miserable. (*Awkwardly*) I told Meldrum off all right, didn't I?

ARIADNE. You did, dear.

JOHN. I suppose he did go pretty far?

ARIADNE. Pretty far.

JOHN. That's what I thought. That's why I said I wouldn't have any of his business in my office again. You heard me say that?

ARIADNE. Didn't you hear me clapping?

JOHN (*eagerly*). Did you?

ARIADNE. Didn't you see the pride of me?

JOHN (*after a pause*). I suppose I shall just have to do this marriage settlement for him. I can hardly get out of that very well. I mean—old Ingleby—

ARIADNE. You needn't be afraid. I fancy you'll find that he has been rather hopeful about that.

JOHN. You mean she won't marry him after all?

ARIADNE. Not she.

JOHN. Oh! . . . (*Thoughtfully*) What a pity! That might have led to something with old Ingleby. Well then (*bravely, but a little reluctantly*), I wash my hands of Meldrum's business altogether. That's settled.

ARIADNE. I don't think you need go quite as far as that, John.

JOHN (*relieved*). Oh! . . . (*Very firmly*) Well, anyhow, he never comes into this house again.

ARIADNE. You know, I don't think it would matter if he did. I think we understand each other now, and he rather amuses me.

JOHN (*relieved*) Oh! . . . well—well, anyhow—

(*But there he stops. There seems to be no other heroic gesture available.*)

ARIADNE. Well, I must be dressing. You're ready.
(*She gets up.*)

JOHN. I'll come up. I've got one or two things to do. (*He looks at his watch and mechanically goes to the clock to put it right. While he is doing this, his back to her, he says shyly*) Ariadne !

ARIADNE. Yes ?

JOHN (*very shyly, very humbly*). Thank you for not going away from me. (*He holds out a hand behind him.*)

ARIADNE (*taking it*). Oh, John !

(*Hand in hand they walk to the door. He opens it for her.*)

JOHN (*with a little smile*). Ariadne first !

ARIADNE (*smiling too*). Just for a little longer.

[*She goes out.*]

(*He waits to turn off the switch. The lamps by the fire are still alight—good money thrown away. Firmly, without hurrying, he begins to walk across the room—*)

ARIADNE (*from outside*). Come along, darling !

(*He stops ; looks at the light. After all, what is twopence ?* ARIADNE *first ! Magnificently he switches all the lights on, and goes after her.*)

PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN
IN SLIPPERS

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

KING HILARY XXIV.

OTHO (*his body-servant*).

PRINCESS AMARIL.

THE STRANGER.

A room in the King's Palace—once upon a time.

It is mid-morning, and His Majesty (aged 30, shall we say ?) is being shaved by OTHO in one of the rooms in his Palace. It is not his bedroom, for he does not sleep there ; nor is it a reception room, though he is soon to receive his Chancellor. Let us call it his dressing-room, and assume that a man, so fond of posing as he, will spend much of his time within it.

He is all the Kings that there have been in fairy-tales and history. All the stories which have been told of the condescension of Kings were first told of him. When the workman's little child falls down in front of the King's carriage ; when the intoxicated reveller, unaware of his identity, treats him as a boon-companion and a fellow-republican ; when the sentry challenges him at the Palace gates, and refuses to let him pass ; in these and a hundred emergencies none so conventionally royal as HILARY. He sees himself always as the hero of a royal story, or as sitter for a royal portrait.

At the moment he is the King condescending to his faithful servant—one of his favourite poses. We must assume that he is wearing his crown—or will as soon as OTHO has finished with him. In those days they always did.

OTHO. There ! As pretty a shave as ever your Majesty has had.

KING. I am indebted to you, good Otho.

OTHO. It is a pleasure to deal with a beard like your

Majesty's. (*Sponging his face*) A beard so—so—if I may use the phrase——

KING. You have my permission.

OTHO. So responsive. A beard like your Majesty's, which, in a manner of speaking, meets the razor half-way——

KING. I don't know that I am interested in the assignations of my beard.

OTHO. As your Majesty pleases. (*He prepares to spray the royal face*) If you will condescend to close your Majesty's eyes——

KING (*closing them*). Gladly. I was fast wearying of the pattern of the ceiling. It has a sort of——

OTHO. If it were also your Majesty's pleasure to close the mouth— Thank you, your Majesty. (*He sprays him*) The towel. (*He hands it.*)

KING (*dabbing his face*). You are the only man in my kingdom who dare tell me to shut my mouth. It is an unusual privilege. You have no children?

OTHO. No, your Majesty, nor likely to.

KING. If I were sure of that, I should make the privilege hereditary. It would be an appropriate reward for your services.

OTHO (*gracefully*). The pleasure and privilege of serving your Majesty——

KING. Is enough? Is that what you were about to say?

OTHO. To tell truth, your Majesty, I proposed to leave the sentence in the air, as a simple expression of loyalty. There were difficulties in the way of finishing it.

KING. Wise Otho.

OTHO. One must live.

KING. True. (*With a yawn*) And we must marry, it seems.

OTHO. It is generally expected of a King.

KING. So much is expected of a King. He has nothing to do but to fulfil expectations.

OTHO. The approaching ceremony is a matter of the utmost rejoicing, your Majesty.

KING. Another simple expression of loyalty ?

OTHO. Not only on my lips this time, your Majesty, but in the hearts of your devoted subjects.

KING. Ah ! (*He permits himself a faint smile*) Now, Otho, here is a question for you. See how you answer it.

OTHO. I will answer it truthfully, your Majesty.

KING. Can loyalty and truth be combined ?

OTHO. By one who has made it his particular study, your Majesty.

KING. Come, then ! Is it for my sake that the people most rejoice, or for the sake of Her Royal Highness ?

OTHO. For both, your Majesty. But in their great loyalty they do not lose sight of the fact that the day is proclaimed a national holiday.

KING (*on his dignity*). Otho !

OTHO (*bowing*). Your Majesty !

KING (*recovering his sense of humour*). You are a good fellow, Otho. (*He laughs.*)

OTHO. Thank you, your Majesty. Your Majesty will understand how devoted I am to your Majesty's service.

KING. A good fellow. But there are moments when I weary of being called Your Majesty more than three times in a sentence. Particularly when, as now, in undress. (*Graciously*) After all, Otho, I am only a man like yourself.

OTHO. It is very condescending of your Majesty.

KING. "Of you."

OTHO (*surprised*). Of me ?

KING. No, no ! . . . Well, well, call me what you like.

OTHO. Thank you, your Majesty. It is, I assure your Majesty, no trouble to me at all.

KING. You will hardly believe it, but that was not in my mind at the moment.

OTHO. Naturally, your Majesty. . . (*He busies himself professionally.*)

KING. So our good people rejoice at the marriage?

OTHO. Men and women, your Majesty, young and old. Indeed, some of the old women, in a spirit of loyal anticipation, have already named the first baby for your Majesty.

KING (*airily*). Boy or girl?

OTHO. They have taken the liberty of anticipating a beautiful young Prince of the name of Rollo.

KING. Remind me when the time comes.

OTHO. Thank you, your Majesty.

KING. Rollo—it is as good a name as any other.

OTHO. The people will be much gratified by your Majesty's choice.

KING. What more can a King desire, my good Otho?

OTHO. It depends a little on the King, your Majesty.

KING (*ironically*). Their gratification would not be lessened by the fact that any such happy event might be made the occasion for *another* national holiday?

OTHO. Speaking as one who will probably not be participating in it, I should imagine not, your Majesty.

KING. Otho!

OTHO (*bowing*). Your Majesty!

KING (*recovering his sense of humour*). You are irresistible. I give you the day now. Make your arrangements. I regret that I cannot guarantee the weather.

OTHO. Your Majesty is gracious as ever to his humble servant. I shall take the liberty of anticipating King's Weather.

KING. That should be easy to a man who has already anticipated the baby.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

A VOICE. May I come in ?

OTHO. Her Royal Highness.

KING (*loftily*). See to it, Otho.

(AMARIL comes in, as pretty as a princess in a story-book. The only fault that we can find in her is that she has a sense of humour. Poor girl.)

PRINCESS. But I am in. (*She curtseys*) Good morning !

KING (*royally*). We are delighted to see your Royal Highness. (*He advances towards her.*)

PRINCESS (*kissing his hand*). Your Majesty !

KING (*raising her to her feet and kissing her formally on the cheek*). Princess ! (*He leads her to a couch.*) You wish to see me ?

PRINCESS. Do I ? I suppose I do. Is it too early—or too late ? Are you at business—or at rest ? To come to a point, have I chosen the wrong moment, or are you glad that I am here ? . . . How difficult for you to answer !

KING. Leave us, Otho.

OTHO (*bowing*). Your Majesty ! Your Royal Highness !

[*He goes out.*]

PRINCESS. Well ?

KING (*stiffly*). No moment is the wrong moment for your Royal Highness, no hour too early, nor too late.

PRINCESS. And yet——?

KING. And yet ?

PRINCESS. You are the King, and I should have craved audience ?

KING. Five minutes ago I was being shaved.

PRINCESS (*happily*). I wish I had seen you.

KING. So that even were I not the King——

PRINCESS. And even were we already married——

KING. I should have wished to know that your Royal Highness——

PRINCESS. "Your Majesty" in that case.

KING. —that your Majesty were coming.

PRINCESS. I understand. I have been forward, ill-bred, unroyal.

KING. My dear Amaril! (*But he looks a little uncomfortable.*)

PRINCESS (*after a pause*). Hilary!

KING. Yes?

PRINCESS (*anxiously*). I may call you Hilary—before we are married?

KING. It is for your Royal Highness to call me whatever she is pleased to call me.

PRINCESS (*smiling*). I used to call you Toto. Do you remember?

KING. I beg you not to call me Toto in front of the Chancellor. He would undoubtedly resign.

PRINCESS. Do you remember?

KING (*stiffly*). We were very young in those days.

PRINCESS. We are not very old now.

KING (*wearily*). I am a hundred and nine. Or is it a hundred and ten?

PRINCESS. I think I could make you younger than that. . . . We used to kiss when we were children. Do you remember?

KING (*gracefully*). It is a privilege which is still granted to me from time to time.

PRINCESS (*shaking her head*). Oh, no! It is not a privilege . . . which is granted . . . from time to time. It just happens. . . . Do you remember how it happened that first time?

KING. How does it happen with children? They are told to kiss each other good-night. Did I have my mouth wiped for me first? I forget.

PRINCESS (*smiling to herself*). We were playing in the gardens. You said you wanted to practise rescues, and

you asked me if I minded falling into the pond, so that you could jump in and save me. And I said I would. And I fell in . . . and a gardener jumped in after me and pulled me out. And I taunted you, and said you had been afraid, and that I should have drowned if the gardener hadn't saved me. And you said you were just going to jump, only your foot slipped ; and I said, No, you were a coward, and the gardener was a much braver man, and I would tell my father, and he would let me marry the gardener when I grew up. And I put my tongue out, and kept saying "Coward !" And suddenly you smacked my face—oh, with all your strength—and cried that you *weren't* a coward, you *weren't*, you *weren't*, and you burst into tears . . . and then your arms were round my neck and you kissed me, and sobbed "Don't marry the gardener. My foot did slip, *really*—but I promise you it will *never* slip again." And so we clung to each other, and cried together. And I promised you that I would marry *you*, not the gardener. . . . And that is why I am marrying you to-morrow—because I promised. . . . (*There is a silence between them.*)

KING (*coldly*). I struck you, I betrayed you, I was a coward ; and you choose this moment to remind me of it.

PRINCESS (*distressed*). Oh *no*, Hilary, no ! . . . It was just the little boy I loved. I wanted to remind you of *him*.

KING. Do you think I need to be reminded ? Do you think I am not ashamed ? A coward !

PRINCESS. No, no, your foot slipped.

KING (*bitterly*). And a liar !

PRINCESS. Oh, let me say it did ! Let me find excuses for you !

KING. We can be honest with each other now.

PRINCESS (*sadly*). Am I going to lose that little boy ?

KING. I want you to know me as I am. Yes, you were right to remind me of what I was, but you will have nothing to fear from me in the future. That I can promise you. I shall not betray you again.

PRINCESS. I was not frightened, Hilary.

KING. Even now, if you were afraid—if you wished to return to your own country—even now——

PRINCESS. Do you want me to go ?

KING (*formally*). How can you ask me ?

PRINCESS (*wistfully*). How can you not answer ?

KING (*gallantly*). Your Royal Highness has made me the proudest man in my Kingdom—and her most devoted subject.

PRINCESS (*with a sigh*). And I once called him Toto !

KING. I think we may assume that Toto is dead.

PRINCESS (*sadly*). I think we may.

KING. But Hilary remains.

PRINCESS. Toto the First is dead. Long live Hilary the Twenty-fourth !

KING. And Long live the Queen !

PRINCESS (*with a sigh*). So long as it doesn't seem long. (*She gets up*) Have I permission to leave your Majesty ?

KING (*smiling*). My reluctant permission. (*He comes to her.*)

PRINCESS. Reluctantly I avail myself of it. (*She kisses his hand. He raises her and kisses her cheek.*)

KING (*whispering as he kisses her*). Don't marry the gardener !

PRINCESS (*turning to him eagerly*). Toto ! (*But he is the King again. She says coldly*) I beg your pardon, Hilary. (*She moves away.*)

KING. Otho !

OTHO (*coming in*). Your Majesty ! (*He opens the door for the Princess*) Your Royal Highness !

[*She goes out.*]

KING. Is the Chancellor here ?

OTHO. Not yet, your Majesty. But there is a sort of person outside who craves admittance into your Majesty's presence.

KING. What sort of person ?

OTHO. Just a sort of person, your Majesty.

KING. What does he want ?

OTHO. What he actually said was : " I want to see the King."

KING. And that is what you call " craving admittance " ?

OTHO. Another form of it, your Majesty. I fancy that he brings a gift for your Majesty's gracious consideration.

KING (*doubtfully*). H'm !

OTHO (*helpfully*). The gift appears to be about two feet by one.

KING (*ironically*). One deduces that it is neither a horse nor a diamond.

OTHO. Of which your Majesty has already a sufficiency.

KING. Why is it that you wish me to see him ?

OTHO. I assure your Majesty that I know nothing of him. Yet there is an air about him. . . .

KING (*resigned*). Well, let him come. (*He seats himself regally.*)

OTHO. Yes, your Majesty.

(*He goes out and returns with the STRANGER. The STRANGER has something wrapped up, two feet by one, under his arm. He bows to the KING.*)

KING. Otho ! (OTHO, *who was going, remains.*) You wish to see me ?

STRANGER. I wish to see your Majesty. . . . I have already had the privilege of seeing your Majesty's body-servant.

KING (*coldly*). Well, now you see us both.

STRANGER. It would seem to be so, your Majesty, but, alas ! it is not. In my great humility, my eyes keep resting upon the humble countenance of your Majesty's servant.

KING. If you have anything to say, you may say it in front of him. He does not talk.

STRANGER. You mean that your Majesty does not listen.

KING (*after a pause*). Leave us, Otho.

OTHO. Your Majesty !

[*He goes.*]

KING (*coldly*). Well ?

STRANGER. I have a marriage gift for your Majesty.

KING. Which my servant may not see ?

STRANGER. Your Majesty would wish to see it first.

KING. Is it so very alarming ?

STRANGER. It is just a mirror.

KING. And what shall I see there ?

STRANGER. Your Majesty will see—himself.

KING (*picking up the hand-mirror*). What else do I see in this ?

STRANGER. Your Majesty sees only the King.

KING (*with a sigh*). True, they are different. The mirror does not show what the skilled painter can show. The portrait of me in my coronation robes which the Court Painter——

STRANGER (*smilingly*). Oh, your Majesty, the Court Painter !

KING (*coldly*). You are in error, sir. I ordered him on this occasion to paint me as I really am. The man beneath the King.

STRANGER (*thoughtfully*). The Court Painter has an extravagant wife and many children.

KING. Well ?

STRANGER. I think he painted the King.

KING (*warningly*). You are a brave man.

STRANGER. I have neither wife nor children.

KING. And a foolish one. There are men, and not Kings only, whose secret selves are hidden from the world. So much is true. Indeed, with a King it must be so. His life is so public that he must needs build himself a private life in which he may take refuge. There are men, yes, and Kings, whose secret selves are hidden even from themselves. They know not of what they are capable. Sometimes I wish that I were one of them. For, oh ! my friend, if ever there was a man who knew himself, and was weary of himself, it is I.

STRANGER. Now, where have I heard that said ?

KING. And so, if your mirror be truly as you say it be, I shall greet the face which I see there as that of an old friend ; the face of a lonely man ; a man who wishes what he will never achieve—to be loved for himself, as he is, with all his faults.

STRANGER. I seem to have heard *that* said too.

KING (*with a sentimental sigh*). With all his faults !

STRANGER. What particular faults were you thinking of, your Majesty ?

KING (*warming to it*). I have, perhaps, an impetuosity which I do not show my people ; a nature capable of more passion than I will let be seen. At heart I am indolent ; I would gladly spend my day listening to music, or in contemplation of nature. I am rash ; it may be that I jump to conclusions too quickly. Extravagant, yes ; those who really knew me would say, "Recklessly so." Ah yes, sir, there is indeed a very humble fellow beneath the King.

STRANGER. He sounds an attractive fellow.

KING (*with a sigh*). I would that I could think so.

STRANGER. I have often noticed that the faults to

which humble people most readily confess are those which, in less humble men, would be regarded as virtues.

KING (*coldly*). Explain yourself.

STRANGER. I have yet to meet a man who says : " Alas, I know myself ! I know that I am a liar and a coward."

KING (*rising furiously*). Sir !

STRANGER. But I have met many who say : " Alas, I am full of faults ! My generosity is extravagance ; my courage, recklessness ; my chivalry, mere foolishness ! "

KING (*grimly*). Of your generosity and chivalry I know nothing, but certainly your courage has the appearance of recklessness.

STRANGER. How so, your Majesty ?

KING. You are at my mercy.

STRANGER. I am content to be so. To every man there comes a time when life has no longer the charm which once he found in it . . . and even to a King there must come a day when the sudden death of another man loses its first beauty.

KING (*sulkily*). I suffer no man to call me coward.

STRANGER. I call your Majesty nothing. It is the mirror which will tell your Majesty the truth.

KING. You think I am afraid to look ?

STRANGER. If your Majesty knows himself, he has no reason to be afraid. (*He begins to unwrap it.*)

KING (*hesitating*). Why do you bring it to me now ?

STRANGER. Your Majesty is to be married to-morrow.

KING. But what of that ?

STRANGER. A man can hide from himself what he cannot hide from his wife. Within a year Her Majesty will know what you will never know, unless you have seen it here—the truth about yourself.

KING. Is it well that I should know ?

STRANGER. A wife should have no secrets from her husband. (*He stands the mirror on the table.*)

KING (*suspiciously*). This is some trick. (*He comes slowly to the mirror, looking doubtfully at the STRANGER as he comes.*)

STRANGER. No trick, your Majesty.

(*The KING stands in front of the mirror. Suddenly he starts back in horror.*)

KING (*furiously*). It is a trick!

STRANGER. No, your Majesty.

(*The KING looks more closely. He moves his head, his hands, his eyes . . . and watches himself, fascinated.*)

KING (*in a low voice*). It is no trick.

STRANGER. What does your Majesty see?

KING (*his eyes still on the mirror, and beckoning with his hand*). Look!

STRANGER (*not moving*). What does your Majesty see?

KING (*slowly*). Cruelty, cowardice, deceit, vanity cunning, arrogance——

STRANGER. It is a catalogue of the lesser virtues.

KING. Treachery, meanness, false humility——

STRANGER. False humility. One must avoid that.

KING. Never have I seen such a face.

STRANGER. It is remarkable how most of us carry it off.

KING. And this man—can I call him a man?—this monster is to be married to-morrow. . . . Poor girl!

STRANGER (*calmly*). Doubtless she knows.

KING (*turning to him*). How can she know? Until two days ago, we had not met since we were children.

STRANGER. True. I was forgetting. It is thus that royalty marries.

KING. She must know.

STRANGER. She will find out.

KING. But it will be too late.

STRANGER. Is it not too late now ?

KING. No ! No ! She must see ! She must be warned !

STRANGER. Is it a marriage of love, then ?

KING (*in a low voice*). I love her. . . . Can a King love ? But I do love her.

STRANGER. Let her see, then.

KING (*still at the mirror*). Yes, yes ! (*He rings a bell.*)

OTHO (*coming in*). Your Majesty !

KING. Otho ! Here ! (*He beckons him to the mirror.*)

STRANGER (*warningly*). Your Majesty ! (*He shakes his head.*)

KING (*taking the hint*). Otho, ask Her Royal Highness if she can give me a moment of her time.

OTHO (*withdrawing*). Yes, your Majesty.

KING. You are right. Otho must not know the truth about me.

STRANGER (*with a smile*). I was not thinking of that, your Majesty. I was thinking that it would be unwise for you to know the truth about Otho.

KING. Unwise ?

STRANGER. The world is at an end if we lose our illusions about our friends. It is a small matter that they should lose theirs about us.

KING (*haughtily*). Otho is my servant.

STRANGER. Yet if he is not your friend, who is ?

KING (*sadly*). True. A King can have no friends.

STRANGER. Which is an excellent reason why he should seek one in the woman he marries. Perhaps it would be better not to show the mirror to Her Royal Highness.

KING. My mind is made up. It is her right.

STRANGER. Then may I suggest that your Majesty stands a little to one side of the mirror, and avoids looking into it, lest he should see Her Royal Highness there.

KING (*angrily*). Do you dare to suggest——

STRANGER. Your Majesty would see nothing but truth and goodness in her face ; yet—what is a woman if she has no secrets from us ?

OTHO (*announcing*). Her Royal Highness !

(*The STRANGER covers the mirror again.*)

PRINCESS (*coming in*). Your Majesty wanted me ?

STRANGER. Have I your Majesty's permission to retire ?

KING (*regally*). We are indebted to you for your gift.

STRANGER (*bowing*). Your Majesty is most gracious.

[*OTHO takes him off.*]

PRINCESS. Nice-looking man. . . . Is it a present, Hilary ?

KING. Come here, Amaril.

PRINCESS (*coming*). Yes ?

KING (*taking her by the shoulders and looking at her*). You will be brave ? But I can see that you are brave.

PRINCESS. What is it ? Are you trying to frighten me ? What has happened ? Why are you so strange ?

KING (*bitterly*). Strange—yes. (*After a pause*) Amaril, what do you really know of me ?

PRINCESS. Nothing, Hilary.

KING. You see the King, wearing his crown—and his mask. But what do you know of the man beneath ?

PRINCESS. Nothing, Hilary.

KING. Yet you are willing to marry me ?

PRINCESS. We have not much choice in our world.

KING. If I could show you the real man ; if the sight of him filled you with horror ; would you have the courage, even at this hour, to leave him and go back to your own country ?

PRINCESS. I am not a coward, Hilary. I would have the courage to leave him, if I wished to leave him—and I would have the courage to stay with him, if I wished to help him.

KING (*bitterly*). No, *you* are not a coward. But what am I?

PRINCESS. I think you are a little morbid about yourself sometimes.

KING. And I have reason to be.

PRINCESS. You have a picture of yourself to show me. Is that it?

KING. A mirror in which you shall see me as I really am.

(*He takes the cover off.*)

PRINCESS. Ah!

KING. When you have seen it, you will know . . . and I shall not see you again. (*He motions her to stand in front of it.*) Come!

PRINCESS (*not moving*). Is it so terrible?

KING. To me, yes. To you, also, when you have seen it.

PRINCESS. Yet you are willing to show it to me?

KING (*with dignity*). It is only fair to your Royal Highness. As a man of honour——

PRINCESS. As a man of honour you are prepared to throw away your chance of happiness with me?

KING (*heroically*). As a man of honour I must.

PRINCESS. It *is* happiness? You still wish me to marry you?

KING. If your Royal Highness could stoop so low. But I am ashamed to ask.

PRINCESS (*her temper rising*). At least, then, I shall see in the mirror the portrait of a man of honour. There will be humility also, and shame. Is it so terrible a picture? (*The KING says nothing. She goes on scornfully*) Or shall I see none of these things? Is His Majesty still posing, still wearing his crown and mask, still making a portrait of himself for his own delight?

KING (*regally*). Madam, you go too far!

PRINCESS (*exhibiting him to the world*). Portrait of King Hilary the Twenty-Fourth on his royal dignity: "Madam, you go too far." One more portrait for your private gallery! Portrait of the King condescending royally to his body-servant: "Amuse me, good Otho. I am aweary of this world." Portrait of the King graciously accepting marriage gifts from strangers: "Sir, we thank you. We Kings are lonely men. . . ." Portrait of the King discovering that he is full of evil and resolving to enter a monastery—portrait of the King deciding that for the sake of his beloved people he will remain outside—portrait of the——

KING (*furiously*). You *dare* to say these things to me?

PRINCESS. I dare to say these things to you! I am not a false, dressed-up coward like—that man! (*In her anger she has been walking up and down, and now finds herself enough in front of the mirror to see the KING's face in it. She points scornfully at it as she says "That man." Then suddenly her expression changes; she looks in amazement at the mirror—at the KING—at the mirror again.*) Toto!

KING (*staggered*). What?

PRINCESS (*turning eagerly to him*). Toto! My darling! You've come back to me!

KING. What madness is this?

PRINCESS (*to the mirror*). My ugly little, stupid little, vain little, bad little, *funny* little Toto! (*She goes to him and throws her arms round him.*) My darling, why didn't you tell me?

KING (*with dignity*). Really, Amaril, this is most—— (*He tries to disengage himself.*)

PRINCESS (*soothing him*). There, there!

OTHO (*outside*). Your Majesty?

KING (*frantically*). Amaril! . . . Enter, Otho!

(*OTHO comes in, as the PRINCESS slips away from the KING. The latter hastily covers the mirror.*)

OTHO. Your Majesty, the Chancellor is without.

KING (*very regal*). We will receive him, Otho. (*He seats himself.*)

PRINCESS (*with immense dignity*). Have I your Majesty's leave to withdraw ?

KING (*offering a royal hand*). Your Royal Highness !

PRINCESS (*kissing it*). Your Majesty !

(OTHO conducts her out by the one door, and returns to the other for the Chancellor. The KING assumes the portrait of "Hilary XXIV. receiving his Chancellor in audience." Just as his expression is at its best, the PRINCESS pops her head in at the door.)

PRINCESS (*in a babyish sing-song voice*). To-to !

(*He turns angrily. She blows a kiss to him and disappears again.*)

OTHO (*announcing*). His Excellency the Chancellor !

(*The KING awaits him regally.*)

SUCCESS

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

THE RT. HON. R. SELBY MANNOCK, M.P.

LADY JANE MANNOCK.

ARTHUR MANNOCK.

FREDA MANNOCK.

DIGBY.

EDWARD EVERSLEY.

BERTIE CAPP.

JOHN READER.

LORD CARCHESTER.

NITE.

SQUIER.

BUTEUS MAIDEN.

SALLY.

ACT I. Cavendish Square. Evening.

ACT II. Enderways, Yorkshire.

Scene 1 : Dick's Room. Midnight . . . and after.

Scene 2 : A Corner of the Wilderness. Early Morning.

ACT III. Cavendish Square.

Scene 1 : Afternoon.

Scene 2 : Afternoon, two days later.

THIS play was first produced at the Haymarket Theatre on
June 21, 1923, with the following cast :

<i>The Rt. Hon. R. Selby Mannoock, M.P.</i>	- CHARLES CHERRY.
<i>Lady Jane Mannoock</i>	- - - - GRACE LANE.
<i>Arthur Mannoock</i>	- - - - JOHN WILLIAMS.
<i>Freda Mannoock</i>	- - - - JOYCE KENNEDY.
<i>Digby</i>	- - - - EUGENE LEAHY.
<i>Edward Eversley</i>	- - - - HALLIWELL HOBBS.
<i>Bertie Capp</i>	- - - - REGINALD OWEN.
<i>John Reader</i>	- * - - - REGINALD BACH.
<i>Lord Carchester</i>	- - - - ERIC STANLEY.
<i>Nite</i>	- - - - SYDNEY BROMLEY.
<i>Squier</i>	- - - - LEWIS SHAW.
<i>Buteus Maiden</i>	- - - - RITA SEYMOUR.
<i>Sally</i>	- - - - MOYNA MACGILL.

ACT I

SCENE : *Cavendish Square. Evening. The MANNOCK family has finished with the grosser forms of eating, and is now dealing politely with the nuts and wine. It does this in what is called the library (though MANNOCK is not much of a reader), leaving the debris of the dinner, and the airs which cling to it, to the dining-room. The four of them, very clean, very proper, very safe, sit round the polished mahogany, cracking, munching, talking. SELBY MANNOCK, that rising young Cabinet Minister in the late forties, is intent on a particularly tiresome nut which won't declare itself. He deals with it methodically, his grave, handsome face showing no sign of anxiety. Probably he was human once, but now the official manner has descended on him. He can say things like "Ladies and Gentlemen, we have nailed our colours to the mast," or "Our glorious Empire on which the sun never sets," without feeling uncomfortable. He is obviously an important man ; not pompously so, but with the quiet assurance which only middle-aged politicians can bring to the pretence that any of us matters more to Heaven than another. There was a time when he had a conscience, but it gave up the struggle some years ago, and is now as departmental as his manner. LADY JANE, his wife, has the manner too. She was born in high politics, whereas MANNOCK has only acquired them.*

She still has the prettiness, though it is colder now, which, with her position and money, carried him off his feet twenty-five years ago, and replaced him a dozen rungs of the ladder ahead of his contemporaries. Her world is divided into people who matter at the moment, and people who don't; to the former she can be very pleasant indeed; to the latter also, if there is a chance of their mattering later on. On the other side of her is their only son ARTHUR, just down from the Varsity. At the moment he is rebellious, hating the manner as much as a Vicar's son hates the Litany. But it is doubtful if he has the moral backbone to fight against it for long. Success will have him for her own; let him make the most of his freedom meanwhile by denouncing the dishonesty of politics and the servitude of a career. At any rate he will amuse FREDa, his younger sister. She also will be successful—probably at St. Margaret's, possibly in the Abbey—but her sense of humour will do something to save her. Their leisurely, well-fed talk has been going on intermittently since the wine went round. . . .

ARTHUR (*suddenly, after a drink*). Well, all I can say is that, if that's the case, you ought to resign! (*He waits with an air, as if for the reporters to write "Sensation."*)

LADY JANE (*after a pause*). Nutcrackers, Arthur.

FREDa. Father's got them. (*Taking them from him*) Here you are.

LADY JANE. Thank you.

ARTHUR (*trying again*). It's the only honest thing to do!

LADY JANE (*languidly*). You're very young, dear. (*Crack!*)

ARTHUR. I suppose I ought to be crushed by that, Mother, but I'm afraid I'm not. I might just as well

say that Father's very middle-aged. That isn't the point.

FREDA. What *is* the point? I seem to have missed it. After you with the crackers, Mother.

ARTHUR. Honesty, even in politics, isn't a question of age. At least it oughtn't to be.

FREDA (*to LADY JANE*). Thanks. . . . It's a question of what you call honesty.

ARTHUR. Exactly! You have two standards; one for private life and one for public life. That's what I protest against.

FREDA. Exit protesting.

LADY JANE. My dear boy, what do you expect? It always has been so, and always will be.

ARTHUR (*aggressively*). Why?

LADY JANE. Don't ask *me*. Why does the sun go round the earth——

FREDA. It doesn't.

LADY JANE (*taken aback, but recovering gallantly*). Well then, why doesn't it? Why—— (*with a wave of her hand*) Why anything? I don't know. You've got to take the world as you find it. When you're young, you think that you're going to make a wonderful new world of it, all by yourself. As you grow up, you realise that you can't, and that, as you haven't very long to be in it, you'll be happier if you make the best you can of the old world.

ARTHUR (*with an air*). Again I protest.

FREDA. Protesting's never any good. You want to break something.

(*And now, at last, SELBY MANNOCK has finished his nut.*)

MANNOCK (*wiping his mouth*). There! . . . What were you saying, Arthur? (*This is too much for ARTHUR, who, after one indignant look, drops into sulky silence.*)

FREDA *(laughs)*. Ring the bell, will you, there's a good boy.

LADY JANE. What is it?

(ARTHUR slouches out of his chair and rings the bell.)

MANNOCK. Thanks, old fellow. . . . Why don't I send in my resignation from the Cabinet? Because my resignation would certainly be accepted.

LADY JANE *(to her son)*. It's ridiculous, dear, to expect your Father to throw up his whole career just for nothing at all. What good would it do?

FREDA *(with interest)*. Would the P.M. accept it, Father?

MANNOCK. I think undoubtedly.

FREDA. I thought that that was where Marjory came in. The Duke wouldn't allow it, would he?

MANNOCK. He mightn't like it, but—— In any case that isn't the point now. Arthur wants, not a mock resignation, but a real one. Why?

ARTHUR *(mumbling)*. The Redistribution Bill.

MANNOCK. Well?

ARTHUR. You said that you thought it monstrous.

MANNOCK. Monstrous was *your* word.

LADY JANE. Your Father only said that he didn't like the Bill.

MANNOCK. And if you had given me time, Arthur, I should have added that I didn't like it because it didn't go far enough.

ARTHUR. Good Lord!

FREDA. It goes pretty far. It will dish Labour jolly well at the next election.

MANNOCK. Well, what am I in politics for at all, if not to do that?

ARTHUR *(rudely)*. You can fight fair, I suppose?

MANNOCK *(calmly)*. My dear Arthur, how on earth is

any one to say what distribution of seats is fair and what isn't?

ARTHUR. You admit that the Government wants redistribution just so as to improve its own electoral chances?

FREDA (*to her Mother*). Its own electoral chances—Arthur is getting quite the manner, isn't he?

(*But LADY JANE does not smile. She has been brought up on the manner.*)

MANNOCK. Certainly I admit it.

ARTHUR (*with a shrug*). Well!

MANNOCK. And I suppose *you* admit that Labour is opposing it just because it spoils *its* own electoral chances?

ARTHUR. Er—naturally——

MANNOCK (*with Arthur's shrug*). Well!

FREDA. Each for himself, and himself for—for himself. Our motto.

ARTHUR (*contemptuously*). Exactly.

MANNOCK. And rightly.

LADY JANE (*with conviction*). Certainly.

MANNOCK. *We* paint England Blue, and Labour comes and paints it Red, and the result is the Purple which suits her. But only if we have the courage to put our whole hearts into the True Blue. If we begin weakly dabbing on a sort of purple blue, what's the result? Not purple at all, but a dirty red. And nobody wants that.

LADY JANE (*interested*). Have you ever used that in the House, Richard? It's rather good.

MANNOCK (*doubtfully*). I don't think so. (*Trying to remember*) No, I don't think so. It would be better on the platform, I think. It isn't altogether sound.

LADY JANE. Sound enough.

MANNOCK. For the platform, yes. . . . Oh, Digby!

[DIGBY *the butler is there.*

DIGBY. Yes, sir?

MANNOCK. Mr. Edward Eversley is coming in this evening. Show him in here.

DIGBY. Yes, sir.

MANNOCK. He'll probably have coffee.

DIGBY. Very good, sir. [*He goes out.*

MANNOCK (*to his wife*). I'm sorry, dear, I meant to have told you.

LADY JANE (*trying to place him*). Eversley. . . . Eversley.

MANNOCK. No, you don't know him. At least, you've met him, I suppose. He was at our wedding.

LADY JANE. Oh!

(*One gathers that many strange friends of her husband's youth were there.*)

MANNOCK. No, I'm not sure that he was.

LADY JANE. What does he do? (*Not that it matters.*)

MANNOCK. He's become a great authority on gardens, I believe. Writes in the papers about them.

LADY JANE (*brightening*). Oh! We might ask him down to Drayton. He could help us with the terraces. Mr. Ferris is so conventional—and so expensive. Not next week—the week after. No, that won't do, because—— (*She tries to remember.*)

FREDA. Have you suddenly found him again, Father, or has he always been about?

MANNOCK. I met him to-day at the Club. He was lunching with somebody. I hadn't seen him for twenty years. . . . More. . . . (*He is thoughtful.*)

FREDA. Twenty years! Almost good enough for a dinner, I should have thought.

MANNOCK. He was only up from the country for a night. He hadn't got any clothes with him.

LADY JANE. I suppose he has some at home?

MANNOCK. I imagine so.

LADY JANE. Then we'd better make it the 23rd. That's the Saturday.

ARTHUR (*aggressively*). Why shouldn't he dine in a tweed suit? And anyway, what's the difference between dining in a tweed suit and coming in after dinner in a tweed suit?

FREDA. About two hours, Arthur.

MANNOCK (*thoughtfully*). I hardly knew him at first. He's gone very grey.

FREDA. Was he your fag at school, or were you his? It's always one or the other.

MANNOCK. Neither. We were contemporaries. And we lived in the same village. He might be a year older. I forget now.

LADY JANE. Well, we'll leave you to talk about the old days together. Is there a Mrs. Eversley?

MANNOCK. Yes. In the country. There was a son, I believe. But that was twenty years ago. I don't know what's happened to him; we didn't get as far as that.

LADY JANE. I suppose she'd have to be asked. (*Hopefully*) Perhaps she's an invalid.

(DIGBY opens the door and announces EDWARD EVERSLEY. *He is the same age as MANNOCK, but looks older and greyer. A pleasant, kindly man, but with the absurd air of being a dear old gentleman. As boys together, MANNOCK was his hero, and even now there is something of that simple boyish admiration and love left in his eyes.*)

DIGBY. Mr. Eversley!

[*He goes out.*

MANNOCK (*getting up*). Good! You're just in time for a glass of port. Let me see, you have met my wife, haven't you?

EVERSLEY (*shaking hands*). How do you do?

LADY JANE (*graciously*). How do you do?

EVERSLEY. You will forgive my clothes, won't you?
Dick explained to you how it was——

LADY JANE (*wondering who Dick is*). Dick? . Oh,
my husband, yes! Of course!

(*She smiles pleasantly at him. After all, he is going
to do the gardens at Drayton for nothing, and
he may even be a constituent.*)

MANNOCK. My younger daughter, Freda. My son,
Arthur. (*They bow and murmur to each other.*) Freda,
you must make room for Mr. Eversley.

FREDA (*making room*). Come on, Mr. Eversley,
We're longing to hear how you and Father robbed the
apple orchard together, and were chased by the farmer,
and thrashed by the headmaster, and all that sort of
thing.

(*DIGBY and a parlourmaid have come in with coffee,
and glasses for the visitor. The coffee is put
in front of LADY JANE. DIGBY walks round
the table with the port and fills EVERSLEY'S
glass.*)

LADY JANE. Don't be ridiculous, Freda.

EVERSLEY (*sadly*). Alas, there are no such stories.
We were model boys. Your father made a false quantity
once—let me see, that would be in '88—but otherwise
we gave no trouble at all. (*With a smile*) Eh, Dick?
(*He drinks his port.*)

MANNOCK (*without enthusiasm for the subject*). We were
pretty ordinary boys, I expect. Cigars, Arthur.

LADY JANE (*handing him a cup*). For Freda. You'll
have coffee?

EVERSLEY. No, thank you.

ARTHUR. Cigar or cigarette?

EVERSLEY. Neither, thank you.

ARTHUR. Father?

MANNOCK (*taking one*). Thank you.

FREDA. Thank you, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Sorry. (*He holds out the box to her and takes one himself, and then goes back to his place.*)

LADY JANE. I hear you're a great authority on gardens.

EVERSLEY. I have a great love for gardens.

LADY JANE. Oh! . . . But you do write about them?

EVERSLEY. Oh yes, yes.

LADY JANE. How delightful! Richard, Mr. Eversley must come down to Drayton—(*to EVERSLEY*) our house in Sussex—and see the gardens there. It would be nice, wouldn't it? (*To EVERSLEY*) We've been making some alterations lately. We should value your opinion—and help.

EVERSLEY. That's very kind of you.

LADY JANE (*with a gesture of "Not at all"*). We must fix up a week-end. Mrs. Eversley too, if she would come. (*She waits hopefully for an announcement that the lady is bedridden, but EVERSLEY only bows.*) That will be nice.

FREDA. You'll like Drayton, it's terribly beautiful.

EVERSLEY. I'm sure I shall.

LADY JANE. You write a great deal, I expect?

EVERSLEY. Well, yes, about things which interest me.

LADY JANE. And know all the editors. . . . Arthur wants to write. It's difficult at first, unless you know the people. A word in the right ear——

EVERSLEY. Ah, but which is the right ear?

LADY JANE. Oh well, of course!

EVERSLEY. I think I should want to whisper a word in the ear of Mr. Arthur. "Trust to yourself. Never mind about introductions. They can't help you."

MANNOCK (*with authority, cigar in mouth*). Naturally,

you have to have it in you. Dickens would always be Dickens, that's true enough. But human nature being what it is. . . . pass the port, Arthur.

EVERSLEY. No more, thank you.

MANNOCK. And what of your own boy, Eversley? You have a son, haven't you?

EVERSLEY (*gently*). Yes, I have a son. I suppose I should say "I had a son." (*They all look elaborately unconcerned.*) He was killed in the war.

LADY JANE (*shocked*). Oh!

MANNOCK. My dear fellow, I beg your pardon.

EVERSLEY (*going on quietly*). But you know, we still say to ourselves, "We have a son." We still have—what made him our son—our love and our pride in him—and we have the sure knowledge that we shall see him again.

(*They look at each other, and away from each other, uncomfortably. Really, the man is being almost irreligious.*)

MANNOCK (*hastily*). Of course, of course!

FREDA. Was he in the Flying Corps?

EVERSLEY. At the end, yes. But he was in the infantry long enough for me to salute him.

(*They all look at him in amazement.*)

LADY JANE. To—to salute him?

EVERSLEY (*smiling*). Yes. You remember all those comic pictures at the time—the manager saluting his clerk—the father saluting his son. Well, we really did it. I was in his battalion, actually in his company, as a private when he was a second lieutenant. (*He beams at them proudly.*)

LADY JANE (*with a glance from him to her husband and back again*). But—but however old were you?

EVERSLEY. Oh, not too old in those days. I've aged since. And, you see, my boy was just a little under

the limit. So he borrowed two years from me, and that made us both quite happy.

(*Now you can almost see LADY JANE looking from that dead boy to her own son, and back again.*)

FREDA. Were you in France together?

EVERSLEY. In different parts of the line. But we managed to meet once or twice.

ARTHUR. You were in France?

EVERSLEY. Yes! Why not?

ARTHUR. Really in France? At the front? In the trenches?

EVERSLEY. Of course.

ARTHUR. And your boy. How old was he when war broke out?

MANNOCK (*knowing what is coming*). Arthur! (*To LADY JANE*) My dear!

ARTHUR. How old—

LADY JANE (*getting up*). How extraordinarily interesting, Mr. Eversley. But you and Richard must have a great deal to talk about with each other. (*They are all up now*) Freda! Arthur! You must bring Mr. Eversley upstairs before he goes, Richard.

MANNOCK. Of course. (*He is opening the door for her.*)

LADY JANE. Thank you. . . . Arthur! (*Reluctantly Arthur follows the ladies out.*)

(*As soon as they are alone EVERSLEY turns to his friend.*)

EVERSLEY. I say, may I smoke a pipe?

MANNOCK (*absently*). Of course!

EVERSLEY. Good! (*He fills it.*)

MANNOCK (*still absently*). We've taken to coming in here at the nuts and wine stage—an old custom of my wife's people.

EVERSLEY. They used to do it at Cambridge—the Dons. Oxford too, I suppose.

MANNOCK. Yes. . . . It's my room really. . . . (*Getting to the point*) What you were saying—about the Army—of course you were younger than I was—

EVERSLEY. One day—don't you remember ? (*MANNOCK looks inquiringly at him*) Our birthdays ? Mine was the day after yours.

MANNOCK. Oh, was that all ? I knew you were younger. . . . You were lucky to be your own master—free to join up. I—I was—it was impossible.

EVERSLEY. My dear Dick, of course ! You were an important member of the Government, running the war for us. I was just at your orders.

MANNOCK. It was my one regret that my—my responsibilities prevented me from shouldering a rifle with—with my friends.

EVERSLEY (*reflectively*). It's funny how people always talked about "shouldering" a rifle. You only shoulder arms in a Rifle Regiment. *We* sloped 'em. (*With a laugh*) There ! That's about all of my soldiering that I remember now. Funny how it slips away.

MANNOCK (*still justifying himself*). Arthur was very anxious to run away from school. Naturally. So was every boy. He wasn't actually eighteen until the last summer. . . . The war was finishing then, and I . . . it seemed a pity, his last term . . . I arranged—

EVERSLEY (*helping him out*). Tell me about your children, Dick. Have I seen them all ?

MANNOCK. There's my elder girl. Marjory.

EVERSLEY. Ah, what about *her* ?

MANNOCK. She married young Robert Harlow.

EVERSLEY (*no wiser*). Oh !

MANNOCK. The Duke's second son, you know.

EVERSLEY. Oh ! . . . I am afraid I am very ignorant. Is there only one Duke ?

MANNOCK. In politics, at present, yes. Only one that matters.

EVERSLEY. Oh!

MANNOCK. It all helps.

EVERSLEY. Oh! (*With a smile*) But it's no good your trying to pretend that she married him just so as to help your political career, Dick.

MANNOCK. Not "just so" of course. She's keen on politics too. Young Harlow is in the House. It helps him to have married my daughter; it helps me that she married *him*.

EVERSLEY. Oh! (*After a pause*) Whom is Miss Freda marrying?

MANNOCK. She's only a child. There's nothing settled.

EVERSLEY. Is she keen on politics too?

MANNOCK. Naturally.

EVERSLEY. And the boy? He wants to write?

MANNOCK. Every young man of intelligence wants to write. He'll get over it.

EVERSLEY. Is he destined for politics too?

MANNOCK. Naturally the choice is his. But I imagine that that's what he will settle down to directly. He has great opportunities.

EVERSLEY. He has indeed. . . .

MANNOCK (*after a pause*). You only had the one boy?

EVERSLEY. Yes.

MANNOCK. A pity.

EVERSLEY. You believe in the large family, Dick?

MANNOCK (*cigar in mouth*). Three or possibly four, yes. Childless marriages in a country like ours—with our Empire, our responsibilities—well, where should we be in another hundred years?

EVERSLEY (*quietly*). We were very poor when we were first married. When my boy was born, we lived in two rooms. Mary was in one; I was in the other.

The walls are thin in those houses. I realised then that it was she who was saving the Empire, not I. It was not for me to say how many children we should have.

MANNOCK. Oh, come! A man can't escape his responsibilities like that.

EVERSLEY. Where were you, Dick, when your first child was born?

MANNOCK. Well, really! I don't know that— Let me see, what year would that be?

EVERSLEY (*to himself*). Ah, then you weren't in the other room.

MANNOCK. No, I was down in Liverpool; of course! My by-election was on. Yes, I remember now. I got a telegram the evening before polling-day. It was just in time. I used to tell Arthur that he won the seat for me. (*Blowing out smoke*) A little human touch like that helps enormously at election time.

EVERSLEY. I see. . . . But of course one can never be quite certain when an election is coming on.

MANNOCK (*taking it literally*). No.

EVERSLEY (*keeping the joke to himself*). Well, well, you haven't much to complain of, Dick. Cabinet Minister! Prime Minister one day, perhaps.

MANNOCK (*with a shrug*). It's just possible, I suppose.

EVERSLEY. Who would have guessed it in the old days?

MANNOCK. I've been lucky, of course. And my wife has helped me enormously.

EVERSLEY. I am sure she has.

MANNOCK. I couldn't have done it without her. It is difficult for an outsider, as I was in the early days. Of course it *has* been done, but only by very exceptional people, and I never claimed to be that. She knew everybody; introduced me to the right people; kept me in front of them. I suppose you would say that I played my cards well, but she dealt me the hand.

EVERSLEY (*to himself*). Yes, yes, I think I understand.

MANNOCK (*with a laugh at the absurdity of it*). In the old days, when we were boys, I used to think it was you who were going to do the big things.

EVERSLEY. No, no. It was always you. Don't you remember? It was always you who were Nite, and I was your Squier. Don't you remember?

MANNOCK (*remembering*). Yes, Nite, Squier and—Yes.

EVERSLEY. And Buteus Maiden.

MANNOCK (*he has never quite forgotten*). And Buteus Maiden.

(*They are silent for a little.*)

EVERSLEY (*humming to himself*). How did it go?

MANNOCK. The War Song of the—what was it?—

EVERSLEY. The Dreadnought Knight.

MANNOCK. Dreadnought?

EVERSLEY. Don't you remember? She said you were her Red Cross Knight, and I said you weren't a Cross, you were only a Nought—you were a Red Nought Knight.

MANNOCK. That's right. And I said—

EVERSLEY. No, *she* said—

MANNOCK. Yes. *She* said I was her Dreadnought Knight.

(*He is a little ashamed of all this, but for the first time you see something of that eager boy who died twenty-five years ago.*)

EVERSLEY (*humming again*). How did it go? *

MANNOCK (*awkwardly ; yet, in some unaccountable way, happy even to be singing it again*).

“ Half a pound of tuppenny rice,

Half a pound of treacle,

That's the way the money goes—

Pop goes the weasel!”

EVERSLEY (*eagerly*). That's it!

MANNOCK. Do you remember how I said——

EVERSLEY. No, I said——

MANNOCK (*after thinking*). That's right. You said that you didn't like rice——

EVERSLEY. And I was always going to say "Half a pound of ham and eggs"——

MANNOCK. And I said that the Squier *always* had to sing the same song as the Nite——

EVERSLEY. And I said anyhow I would jolly well *think* ham and eggs——

MANNOCK (*very eagerly*). And *she* said——. (*He breaks off suddenly, and there is a little silence.*)

EVERSLEY (*gently*). Dick, have you—do you ever—have you ever seen Sally—well, I mean, since we——

MANNOCK (*in a low voice*). No. Not since——

EVERSLEY. That last summer?

MANNOCK (*shaking his head*). No. I went to London——

EVERSLEY. We both went to London.

MANNOCK. I had just been called.

EVERSLEY. I had just got a job in the City.

MANNOCK. Didn't *you* ever go down to Enderways again?

EVERSLEY. No.

MANNOCK. Why not?

EVERSLEY. I was afraid to.

MANNOCK. How do you mean?

EVERSLEY (*awkwardly*). I thought I—I thought you—— Of course, a little later, when I met Mary, I knew that I never had been really in love with Sally, but I thought I was then, and I thought you—it seemed to be understood. (*To himself*) You were her Dreadnought Knight.

MANNOCK (*with a self-conscious laugh*). Just a boy and girl romance. I—it was impossible. She—we had no

money. How could we? Better to make a clean sweep of it all, and begin again.

EVERSLEY (*to himself*). So you began again. . . . And gradually success closed in on you.

MANNOCK (*looking at him sharply*). What an extraordinary remark!

EVERSLEY (*surprised*). What?

MANNOCK. Success "closed in" on you.

EVERSLEY. Did I say that? (*With an embarrassed little laugh*) I beg your pardon. I had no idea. No idea even that I was thinking it. Ridiculous! (*After a pause*) She's married now, you know.

MANNOCK (*wishing to be done with the subject*). I'm glad.

EVERSLEY. But not very happily.

MANNOCK. Ah, I'm sorry about that. The Old Man's dead long ago, of course?

EVERSLEY. Of course.

MANNOCK (*with a laugh*). The Old Man. (*Tapping his head*) Never quite all there, was he?

EVERSLEY. I don't think that we used to say that when we were boys, Dick. Sally didn't.

MANNOCK. Of course! Her own father!

EVERSLEY. Unworldly. . . . Perhaps that's the same nowadays as not being quite all there.

MANNOCK. The two of them alone together all those years in that rambling old house!

EVERSLEY (*with a chuckle*). Hardly alone. We practically lived there in the holidays.

MANNOCK. What happened to the place?

EVERSLEY. She lives there still. That was all he left her, you know. I think she married to save it.

MANNOCK. It all seems very long ago.

(*They sit there silently thinking of the long ago.*

. . . FREDa comes in, followed by BERTIE CAPP,

a stout young man, who tries to hide his extreme cleverness beneath the make-up of a fool.)

FREDA. Here's Bertie, Father.

MANNOCK (*coming out of the past*). Hullo, Bertie. How are you?

BERTIE (*dropping his eye-glass*). Pretty well, thanks.

FREDA. Don't go too close to him, he's covered with eucalyptus.

BERTIE. A precautionary measure only. The cold belongs to somebody else. My private microbes——

MANNOCK (*to EVERSLEY*). Do you know Bertie Capp?
. . . This is Mr. Eversley.

BERTIE. How are *you*, sir?

EVERSLEY. How do you do?

BERTIE. My private microbes, who distribute gout and insomnia, are resting for the moment. It's a hard life.

MANNOCK. How's the Prime Minister?

BERTIE (*waving his handkerchief*). Like that.

FREDA (*with a face*). Oh, put it away, Bertie. I'd rather have the cold.

BERTIE. I give him two more days in bed. Between ourselves he likes it there.

FREDA (*to EVERSLEY*). Bertie is the P.M.'s P.P.S.

EVERSLEY (*with a smile*). Thank you very much.

FREDA. The Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary. In other words, Bertie runs England.

BERTIE. I consult Miss Freda on all the important points.

MANNOCK (*to BERTIE*). Did you want to see me?

BERTIE. Well—er——

FREDA. Come on, Mr. Eversley. We'll go upstairs.

EVERSLEY (*to MANNOCK*). Perhaps I'd better say good-bye, Dick.

MANNOCK (*carelessly*). Good-bye. I'll be seeing you

again before very long. Talk to my wife about that week-end.

EVERSLEY. Thank you, thank you. (*To BERTIE*) Good-night.

BERTIE. Good-night. (*He opens the door*) I hope I haven't given you the Prime Minister's cold.

EVERSLEY (*smiling*). It would be an honour to have it.

BERTIE. Oh well, he's nearly finished with it. Good-night. Good-night, Freda, if I don't see you again.

FREDA. Good-night. [*They go out.*]

BERTIE (*closing the door*). Is that the Garden Eversley?

MANNOCK (*surprised*). Yes. Do you know him?

BERTIE. I know his book, of course.

MANNOCK. Oh! (*With a faint touch of pride*) We were boys together.

BERTIE. He's a good bit older than you, isn't he?

MANNOCK (*hastily*). There was not much in it. Well?

BERTIE (*taking a large envelope from his pocket*). The Prime Minister's compliments, and would you rather have a Baronetcy or an absolute snip for the 2.30?

MANNOCK (*not surprised*). Ah! It's all right, then?

BERTIE. Very much all right. Between ourselves, it's a damn good speech. I read it to him. He just lay there, without a movement. Absorbed.

MANNOCK. Asleep, probably.

BERTIE (*candidly*). Well, so I thought at first. But I drank his medicine once by mistake—being a thirsty sort of speech, I had put a glass of water handy—and the subsequent noise woke him. I mean it was obvious he was awake all the time.

MANNOCK (*unamused*). Any comments?

BERTIE. Well, yes.

MANNOCK. What?

BERTIE. "Clever fellow, Mannoek. Er——"

MANNOCK. Go on.

BERTIE. "Clever fellow, Mannock. He brings to the obvious such a wealth of reticence that it almost sounds improper." Said between coughs and grunts, you know, it sounded rather good. But I daresay there isn't much in it.

MANNOCK. You have to be obvious on the platform.

BERTIE. Oh, quite. . . . I say, do you see *The Sunday Socialist*?

MANNOCK (*curtly*). Never.

BERTIE (*taking it from his pocket*). You haven't seen this week's?

MANNOCK. Why should I?

BERTIE. We take it in, of course. "My attention has been drawn . . ." and all that sort of thing. (*Pointing to the place*) There! (*As MANNOCK reads*) I thought I'd better bring it along.

MANNOCK (*reading*). Yes. . . . Yes.

BERTIE. Once doesn't matter—you can deny anything once—but if he's going to make a habit of it—

MANNOCK (*firmly*). He is not. (*He goes on reading*.)

BERTIE. Well, I'll be getting along.

MANNOCK. Thanks very much for letting me see this. Are you going upstairs?

BERTIE. Just for a moment.

MANNOCK. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling Arthur that I should like to see him.

BERTIE. Right. (*Going to the door*) By the way, where are you sleeping to-morrow night? Hotel?

MANNOCK (*still reading the paper*). Carchester's putting me up. He's got some sort of place in the neighbourhood, I believe.

BERTIE. Ah! I didn't know that you—— (*He hesitates*.)

MANNOCK. We don't.

BERTIE (*tolerantly*). Oh, well, it takes all sorts to make a party.

MANNOCK. Exactly. This is politics. He's popular down there, they say. He's taking the chair at the evening meeting.

BERTIE. Oh, quite. Well, good-night and good luck.

MANNOCK. Good-night.

(*He settles down to this damnable article again.*
ARTHUR comes in.)

ARTHUR. Bertie said you wanted me.

MANNOCK (*getting up*). Yes; sit down, won't you?
(ARTHUR sits down) Did you write this? (*He gives him the paper.*)

ARTHUR (*bracing himself for the row that's coming*). Yes.

MANNOCK. Ah! Proud of it?

ARTHUR. Not ashamed of it anyway.

MANNOCK. Then you ought to be.

ARTHUR. I don't see why.

MANNOCK. An inflammatory article in a revolutionary rag——

ARTHUR. Papers aren't rags just because you don't agree with their opinions.

MANNOCK. An impertinent article in a revolutionary rag, charging members of the Government, amongst them your own Father, with every sort of crime and folly.

ARTHUR (*calmly*). It just means that I take the opposite side to you, that's all.

MANNOCK (*reading*). "There is more here than political dishonour. There is personal dishonour."

ARTHUR (*uncomfortably*). Well—I mean——

MANNOCK. Thank you, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Well, it isn't *my* fault you're a Cabinet Minister. I happen to be a Socialist——

MANNOCK. A Socialist!

ARTHUR. Why not ?

MANNOCK (*contemptuously*). Why not ! Have another cigar ? Have another glass of port ? A Socialist ! Look at yourself in the glass !

ARTHUR. Well, you can't have it both ways. If I'm a poor, uneducated devil, you say contemptuously "Of course you're a Socialist ; you want my money," and if I happen to be well-off and educated, you say contemptuously, "You a Socialist ! Look at yourself in the glass !" You can't have it both ways.

MANNOCK. I beg your pardon. In fact, I'm not sure that I ought to be discussing this with you at all. This article (*tapping the paper*) is signed "Arthur Selby Mannock." I don't think I know him. Who is he ?

ARTHUR. That's not my fault. I suppose——

MANNOCK. Your name, I think, is Arthur James Mannock ? Why do you give a false name ?

ARTHUR. I signed it "Arthur Mannock." Of course it had this address on it. I suppose——

MANNOCK. You suppose that the editor, wishing everybody to know that a Cabinet Minister was being accused of personal dishonour by his own son, altered it to Selby Mannock so that there should be no chance of misapprehension.

ARTHUR. I suppose he thought it was a double-barrelled name. All the papers call you Selby Mannock as if it were.

MANNOCK (*quietly*). You know quite well why he did it. (ARTHUR *is silent*.) How many more of these articles are you writing—from my house ?

ARTHUR. Well—well, as a matter of fact, they've offered me a job, sort of assistant editor—two fifty—I could get rooms somewhere—I mean, naturally I want to. I mean——

MANNOCK (*with a sneer*). Assistant editor ! . . . As

assistant editor it would be your job to see that the "Selby" didn't go into your articles——

ARTHUR. Naturally——

MANNOCK. Or did go in, according as the editor wished.

ARTHUR. Well, of course I should—— (*His voice trails away.*)

(*They are silent. MANNOCK, realising that he is not getting much further, decides on a new line of attack.*)

MANNOCK (*with a friendly smile*). Look here, Arthur, let's talk this over reasonably.

ARTHUR. I shall be only too glad to.

MANNOCK (*charmingly*). Well, then, first, thank you for having kept your temper so well. I'm afraid I've been rather provocative.

ARTHUR. Oh, I say, not at all.

MANNOCK. I do say it. And that's the trouble, Arthur. You've got such a lot of fine qualities. Brains——more brains than I have, I fancy——

ARTHUR. Oh, rot!

MANNOCK. Enthusiasm, good temper, courage—— Well, I mean, how many young men would have dared to do that? (*He waves at the paper.*)

ARTHUR. Oh, I don't know.

MANNOCK. As the Prime Minister said to me the other day, "That boy of yours will go far." I know it. But in which direction? . . . It's a funny thing, Arthur, how so many great political geniuses, writers too, have started in the wrong direction. Disraeli began as a Radical, Gladstone as a Tory—— It almost seems as if one false start were necessary before you can get going. The trouble is that your enemies remember that false start, and bring it up against you. Happy the man who has no past, as somebody said. Well,

that's what I'm anxious about. You're preparing a past for yourself *now*. I wonder if—— You don't mind my talking like this?

ARTHUR (*interested and flattered*). Of course not.

MANNOCK. You're a Socialist. Right. I don't agree with your opinions, but that has nothing to do with it. Now what I'm wondering is—— Need you be a *public* Socialist for—well, say for a year?

ARTHUR. How do you mean? (*With a laugh*) I shan't change in a year, if that's what you're hoping.

MANNOCK (*laughing too*). I'm afraid you won't. (*With an air of great seriousness*) But frankly, Arthur, old boy, I'm in a difficulty. I've been wanting to make a suggestion to you for some weeks now, only—I've been afraid.

ARTHUR. Afraid?

MANNOCK. Yes, afraid of your refusing it. I've preferred to go on hoping, rather than to close the door on my hopes by speaking to you.

ARTHUR (*after waiting for him*). Well?

MANNOCK. My secretary is leaving me. It puts me in rather an awkward position.

ARTHUR. Which of the many?

MANNOCK. Well, naturally I don't mean at the Ministry. Reader. (*He jerks his head at the door behind him.*)

ARTHUR. Reader? Why?

MANNOCK. He's got a better job in prospect. He's been with me a long time, but he's leaving me at last. I shall be rather lost without him. Arthur, old boy, I wish you'd take his place.

ARTHUR (*staggered*). But——

MANNOCK. Three hundred a year I'll give you. Three fifty if you want to live out, but I'd rather you didn't.

ARTHUR. But I'm—my political opinions——

MANNOCK. I know, I know. That's why I was afraid to ask you. But couldn't you manage to keep an open mind for a year? I want you to see something of the inside of politics. If at the end of a year, you're more of a Socialist than ever, well, what a chance for you! You'll be able to expose us properly! You'll know all about us! But if I'm lucky enough to win your confidence, why perhaps one day the proudest moment of my life will come. Do you know what that will be?

ARTHUR. What?

MANNOCK. The moment when I introduce you to the Speaker in the House of Commons. Arthur Mannock, M.P. for—— We can find you a dozen seats.

(They sit there, Arthur thinking, Mannock watching him anxiously.)

ARTHUR *(after a pause)*. It's really awfully decent of you, Father.

MANNOCK. You see, I want you rather badly.

ARTHUR. You're sure it doesn't commit me to anything?

MANNOCK *(quickly)*. Not a bit.

ARTHUR. And if, after a year——

MANNOCK. Exactly.

ARTHUR. And you would absolve me of any charge of disloyalty, if——

MANNOCK. Of course! of course!

ARTHUR *(after thinking)*. Right you are, Father. I'll take it on.

(Mannock turns away with a big sigh of relief.)

MANNOCK. Thank you, old boy. I'm sure you won't regret it. . . . Oh, there's just one other thing. I shall keep you pretty busy. Better take a holiday now, while Reader is still here.

ARTHUR. Well——

MANNOCK. Hard up?

ARTHUR (*smiling*). Fairly.

MANNOCK (*smiling*). I'll see to that.

ARTHUR. I say, you are a sportsman. Thanks awfully!

MANNOCK. That's all right. (*Dismissing him*) Well, I must go through my speech with Reader.

ARTHUR. That's to-morrow, isn't it? At Leeds.

MANNOCK. Yes.

ARTHUR (*smiling*). Well, entirely without prejudice to my political opinions, I hope they won't throw anything at you.

(*He goes. MANNOCK laughs heartily until the door closes. Then, in a flash, his pleasant manner disappears. He walks to his desk and picks up the telephone.*)

MANNOCK. Hullo! Come in, will you? (*He sits down and writes out a cheque. While he is so engaged, JOHN READER comes in, a serious young man with the great virtues of industry and loyalty, but a pathetic lack of anything else.*) Ah, Reader, just wait a moment. Got the speech?

READER. Yes, sir.

MANNOCK (*getting up, cheque in hand*). Good. All right?

READER. I have verified the dates and the extracts from other speeches. There was one misquotation from Wordsworth which I have corrected.

MANNOCK. I'm not sure that a misquotation isn't a good thing sometimes. Some fool is sure to write to the papers to point it out, and then one writes back and says that it's the fault of the reporter or the printer, and then the reporter writes and says—well, it's all publicity.

READER (*reproachfully*). You remember what *The Spectator* said last week—the one member of the

Cabinet who could be trusted not to bungle a literary quotation.

MANNOCK. Yes, well, that's something.

READER (*turning the pages*). One or two little angularities of style I have ventured to—— Oh, and then there's this passage. This was not in the Prime Minister's draft——

MANNOCK (*looking over his shoulder*). No, it wasn't, was it?

READER. You seem to go some way beyond your colleagues. Of course it's not for me——

MANNOCK. Naturally.

READER. I just wanted to be sure that there was no mistake.

MANNOCK. There is no mistake, Reader—at present. It may be necessary for there to be one later on. I may find—later on—that I spoke from the wrong draft, in error. You understand?

READER. Quite so, sir. I thought I would just mention it.

MANNOCK. That's right. . . . And now, my dear fellow, I have something to tell you which I cannot flatter myself will be the distress to you that it is to me. The fact is that I am unable to avail myself of your services, your very great services, any longer.

READER (*utterly taken aback*). You mean that I—that you——

MANNOCK. I'm afraid so, Reader.

READER. But what have I—aren't you——

MANNOCK. Perfectly satisfied. Oh, it's not that at all. I can recommend you with the utmost confidence, and, in fact, I will make it my business to see that you are comfortably settled with some one else. But my son is very anxious to get an insight into politics, and I have been thinking that the best way—it has been in

my mind for some weeks, and he is delighted at the suggestion—the best way would be for him to take over your duties, and—— (*Fingering the cheque*) In the circumstances, I have ventured to make this out for two months' salary, although I shall only require your services for one month longer. Here you are, my dear fellow.

READER (*mechanically*). That's very good of you, sir. . . . It's a little awkward—my wife—coming just now—she's not—she will be—— (*Looking at the cheque*) Of course this is very generous of you——

MANNOCK. Not at all. I owe it to you. But you understand that I must think of my boy—it is his desire——

READER. Of course, sir. Naturally that comes first with you. I only wish—you see, just now my wife——

MANNOCK (*holding up his hand*). I don't think, Reader, that I can be expected—— (*Reproachfully*) I can hardly be expected——

READER. No, no, of course not. . . . Coming just now—she will be frightened——

MANNOCK. I think that both of you will be distressing yourselves needlessly. There will be no difficulty whatever about finding you—— I will speak to Mr. Capp to-morrow. Remind me. I fancy that Carfax——

LADY JANE *comes in*.

LADY JANE. Busy?

MANNOCK (*glad of the interruption*). Oh no, not at all. (*To READER*) Then that's understood. I will speak to-morrow to Mr. Capp. I think Carfax is the man. (*Taking the speech from him*) Thank you. Good-night, Reader.

READER (*a trifle dazed*). Good-night, sir. Good-night, Lady Jane.

LADY JANE. Good-night. (*He goes out.* LADY JANE *sits down gracefully.* MANNOCK *stands at the fireplace, turning over the pages of his speech*) Arthur tells me he's coming to you.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. I'm glad.

MANNOCK. You heard what he'd been doing?

LADY JANE. Yes. Silly boy.

MANNOCK. He didn't realise—and I didn't tell him.

LADY JANE. The least thing might make the difference now.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. Bertie tells me that C. J. is going to the Lords almost at once.

MANNOCK. I thought you knew.

LADY JANE. Not definitely. I suppose Mowbray will be Chancellor of the Exchequer?

MANNOCK. Sure to be.

LADY JANE. Bertie seemed to think it wasn't absolutely settled yet.

MANNOCK. The Duke doesn't like Mowbray, of course.

LADY JANE. No. . . . It's all been so sudden. We haven't had time to do anything.

MANNOCK. C. J. has been breaking up for months.

LADY JANE. Yes, but not publicly before. He might easily have lasted another year.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. Suppose it *is* Mowbray, who'll have the Admiralty? (MANNOCK *shrugs his shoulders.*) Would you take it?

MANNOCK (*not sure*). What do you think?

LADY JANE. No.

MANNOCK. Yes, that's what I feel.

LADY JANE. "Too devoted to your present work," and so on. That always sounds well with the public.

MANNOCK. Yes. (*They smile faintly at each other, and are silent, both thinking. . . .*) Eversley gone?

LADY JANE. Yes.

MANNOCK. What did you do about that week-end?

LADY JANE. Left it vague. Said I'd write.

MANNOCK (*relieved*). Ah! Then, in that case, I think perhaps——

LADY JANE. So do I. . . . It's always a mistake—trying to get back.

MANNOCK. Yes. . . . Bertie knew about him. The Garden Eversley.

LADY JANE (*surprised*). Oh? . . . Oh! (*meaning that, of course, that makes a difference*) . . . Oh, then perhaps——

MANNOCK (*shaking his head*). I think I would rather—He's a little disturbing.

LADY JANE. They always are—coming in suddenly from outside like that. Particularly when——

MANNOCK (*wishing to be fair*). He was the Vicar's son, I was the Doctor's.

LADY JANE. Oh, *then*, yes. . . . (*She gets up*) Shall I see you in the morning?

MANNOCK. I don't expect so. I have a fairly early train. There are the two meetings.

LADY JANE. Yes. . . . Leeds might make a difference.

MANNOCK. It might.

LADY JANE. I suppose Mowbray *is* a certainty?

MANNOCK (*with a shrug*). He may not last long.

LADY JANE. If only we had seen it coming. . . . Bertie doesn't think much of him.

MANNOCK. Bertie, no.

LADY JANE. Bertie counts for a good deal with the Prime Minister.

MANNOCK. Up to a point, yes. Not beyond.

LADY JANE. Still—(*she is silent for a little and then says*) I sometimes wonder if Freda—(*and is silent again*).

MANNOCK. It would help, of course.

LADY JANE. Yes. . . Good-night. (*She holds up her cheek and he kisses it carelessly.*)

MANNOCK. Good-night. (*She goes out—to FREDA'S room, we may be sure.*)

(MANNOCK glances at his speech, spreads it out on the desk beside him, puts on his glasses, and with a final glance at the opening, stands up and delivers it.)

MANNOCK. Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen. In coming before you to-night at this great crisis in our political affairs, when, not for the first time in her eventful history our country stands at the parting of the ways, I am conscious—(*He glances at the speech and corrects himself*)—I am not unconscious—I am not unconscious of a certain pride in the knowledge that it is before my own good friends of Yorkshire—my own people, as I must always think of them—that I am privileged to plead my cause. I was born on Yorkshire soil, I was nurtured through youth to early manhood in the bosom of your hills. Memories of my boyhood come back to me as I stand here to-night . . . memories of those happy days return to me (*And quite unexpectedly, just for a moment, they do. He breaks off, and says in a whisper*) Those happy days. . . . (*He is at Enderways now. There, armed to the teeth, march NITE and SQUIER; there, waiting to be rescued, sits the BUTEUS MAIDEN. Now it is DICK and TEDDY and SALLY. "Sally!" With a jerk he comes awake again, and hurries back to Leeds*) And so, ladies and gentlemen, in delivering my message to you to-night—speaking as I do, not only for myself, but for the Government which I have the honour to represent. . . . (*And so on. We can always read it in "The Times."*)

ACT II

Enderways, Yorkshire

SCENE 1

It was known as Dick's room in the old days, so perhaps we may still call it that. For a small boy, home for his holidays, it was all very well, this exciting nest in the roof, but it is terrible to think that a Cabinet Minister is now expected to sleep there.

The room is empty at first, and in darkness. Then we hear a voice outside, and LORD CARCHESTER opens the door and puts the light on for us. So we get our one glimpse of him—Sally's husband; a big, easy-going, easy-moralled, rather battered man-of-the-world, who, as usual with him at this time of the night, has had just enough to drink and means to have one or two more.

CARCHESTER (*outside*). Wait a moment. I'd better go first and put the light on. (*He does so, and makes way for MANNOCK*) There you are.

MANNOCK (*coming in*). Thanks. (*He sees the room*) By Jove!

CARCHESTER (*for the tenth time*). I really do apologise, but Sally insisted on it.

MANNOCK (*impatiently*). My dear Carchester, of course! (*To himself*) Of course she did.

CARCHESTER. Said you would understand.

MANNOCK. I understand.

(He is still looking, looking at the room, drinking it in. The years are dropping off him.)

CARCHESTER. Never argue with a woman. I've learnt that—(*the man-of-the-world laughs*)—if I've learnt nothing else.

MANNOCK (*carelessly*). I shall be quite all right here, thanks. (*He wants to be alone with the memories of the room.*)

CARCHESTER (*sitting down on the bed*). Funny your turning out to be an old friend of Sally's like this.

MANNOCK. We were boy and girl together. I used to stay here in the holidays. (*With a deep sigh of remembrance*) This was my room.

CARCHESTER. Ah well, then, that accounts for it. Still, why not be comfortable in a decent room when you can? (*He sinks into somnolence, rousing himself a moment to say sleepily*) That was a damn good speech you made.

(*MANNOCK is not listening to his host ; it is the room which is calling to him. He goes quickly to the window, to the cupboard, finding, remembering, missing. Suddenly he bends down, and turns back a corner of the carpet.*)

MANNOCK. Hullo !

CARCHESTER (*waking up with a start*). What's the matter ?

MANNOCK (*accusingly*). There used to be a rat-hole here. It's been boarded up.

CARCHESTER. Good Lord, what do you do to rat-holes? (*He settles down to sleep again. But not for long.*)

MANNOCK (*severely*). That bed ought to be over here !

CARCHESTER (*dimly feeling that it is his fault*). I beg your pardon, I didn't—(*he tries to rise in apology, but sinks back again.*)

MANNOCK. Up against the wall.

(*He goes to the wall suddenly and taps ; a peculiar*

rhythmic series of taps, just above where the bed used to be.)

CARCHESTER. Hullo !

MANNOCK (*coming to himself with an apologetic laugh*). Who sleeps there now ?

CARCHESTER. The staff. I dunno. P'raps it's the cook. (*Wagging his head in reproof*) Too old, Mannock, my boy. Too stout.

(MANNOCK *turns away in disgust. Then he goes back to the wall, and begins to talk, looking at CARCHESTER, but seeing only himself as a boy, thirty-five years ago.*)

MANNOCK. That was the signal. That meant " I want to talk to you." Then we talked to each other through the wall. One tap for A, two for B, and so on, spelling out messages. Oh, for hours sometimes . . . just making up things to say . . . plans for to-morrow . . . wonderful plans for to-morrow . . . adventures which never quite happened. " G " meant " Good-bye "—if one sent it, the other had to stop and go to sleep. " G.D. " meant " Good-bye, dear "—that was when we had had a specially happy day together. Then, in the morning, the first one awake sent the signal. If the other one answered it, the first one sent " S.W. "—that meant " Shall we ? " Shall we get up ? " Y " for " Yes," and we'd race each other to be first down on that old broken wall in the Wilderness.

(*He stops ; he is racing to be first down ; SALLY'S door flies open ; she has the start of him. She can run—how she can run !—but he will catch her . . . CARCHESTER breaks in on his vision.*)

CARCHESTER. A damn good speech. (*He yawns*) And mind you, I know what I'm talking about, because I was awake practically all the time. (*He struggles to his feet*) I say, what about another spot of whisky ?

MANNOCK (*curtly*). No, thanks.

CARCHESTER. Just a little baby spot? You won't? Well, I will. Quite sure you're all right here?

MANNOCK. Yes, thanks.

CARCHESTER (*getting to the door*). Well then, g'night.

MANNOCK. Good-night.

CARCHESTER (*after thought*). G'night. (*He opens the door, and then turns round with the air of one having a message to deliver. He delivers it.*) G'night. (*He goes.*)

(MANNOCK is alone with his room; alone with a thousand ghosts, a thousand memories; most of them happy ones, bringing a smile to his face; all of them tearing at that solemn mask of success in which, for so many years, he has hidden himself. You can see the mask falling from him, you can see those years dropping away. . . .)

He takes off his coat and waistcoat and puts on a dressing-gown; takes off his shoes and puts on bedroom slippers. Then he sits on the bed, still smiling at his thoughts. He swings his feet up and puts his head back on the pillows, looking up at the well-remembered ceiling. He gives a deep sigh, and just breathes the word "Sally!" Sleepily he puts his hand up to the wall and gives that rhythmic knock. There is no answer; it is the wrong wall; it was a thousand years ago. But, still sleepily, he taps out G.D., "Good-bye, dear, God be with you, dear." Then his hand, coming down from the wall, feels the electric switch. With the happy sigh of one on the very threshold of sleep, he turns off the light . . . and the thousand ghosts, who have been waiting for him, rush thronging into his dreams. . . .

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*Listen ! Very faint, very far-off, a tune is coming—
the War Song of the Dreadnought Nite . . .*

Pom-perom-perompity-pom. . . .

Now it comes again, clearer, louder . . . Pom-perom-perompity-pom. . . .

Now the DREADNOUGHT NITE is here ; here too is his faithful SQUIER. . . . Pom-perom-perompity-pom. . . . A whole orchestra of sound.

Listen ! It is only a child's trumpet. . . . And—see !—there are the children. For it is light now, and we can see where we are. Yet, even so, we are not quite certain. For there is the bed with MANNOCK (is it ?) still lying there, but there also is that overgrown, tangled corner of the Wilderness, and the broken wall where DICK and SALLY used to meet.

"Pom-perom-perompity-pom." It is the faithful SQUIER who has the trumpet. NITE, in a paper cap, and with a martial sword in hand, leads the way. SQUIER, a toy gun hung round him, follows tooting. . . .

Enough, however, of toots. Let NITE give tongue.

NITE (*singing lustily*).

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,

Half a pound of treacle,

That's the way the money goes—

Pop goes the weasel !

Come on, Squier !

SQUIER. Half a pound of ham and eggs,

Half a pound of treacle—

That's the way—

NITE. That's *not* the way ! It's "tuppenny rice."

SQUIER (*reproachfully*). You know I *always* say ham and eggs, Nite !

NITE. Well, what's the good of being my Squier, if

you don't sing the same as me? Squiers *always* sing the same as Nites.

SQUIER. *Sally* said——

NITE (*seeing* MANNOCK). Hullo! Here's an old, dead gentleman.

SQUIER. Oughtn't I to salute him? (*He unslings his gun.*)

NITE (*sternly*). Wait till I give the order. Now then, Squier, shun! Shoulder—*arms*! (*SQUIER slopes*) That's not shouldering arms, stupid, that's sloping.

SQUIER. That's all the shouldering you'll get. (*Proudly*) We don't shoulder in *our* regiment.

NITE. Then you can jolly well take a month's notice, and I shall engage an entirely new Squier. (*SQUIER salutes, walks away a few paces and comes back again.*) Are you an entirely new Squier?

SQUIER (*saluting*). Yes.

NITE. Then I shall give you 350 a year.

SQUIER. 350 what?

NITE. Oh, I dunno. Stand easy. (*Kindly*) You can look at the old gentleman if you like.

SQUIER (*looking*). Is he a *very* old gentleman, Nite?

NITE. Not so tremendous. About 25 or 50 or something.

SQUIER. Is he dead?

NITE. Oh, a long time ago, I should think. Just as dead as dead.

SQUIER. Then I shall sing to him. (*Singing*) "Half a pound——"

MANNOCK (*sitting up*). I'm not dead. I've heard every word you've been saying.

NITE (*to* SQUIER). He says he isn't dead.

SQUIER. Ask him if he can sing.

NITE. Can you sing?

MANNOCK. Rather!

NITE. All right, sing !

MANNOCK. " Half a pound of tuppenny rice, half a pound of treacle——"

NITE (*triumphantly*). There you are, Squier !

SQUIER (*wistfully*). I always say " Ham and eggs "

MANNOCK (*shaking his head*). Wrong !

NITE. There you are, Squier !

SQUIER (*sadly*). I don't like rice.

MANNOCK. Ah, but wait till you try the tuppenny sort. Whew !

SQUIER. Is that a bit better ?

MANNOCK. Ever so much.

SQUIER. Oh ! (*Humbly*) Still, I think I'll go on saying ham and eggs, if you don't mind very much.

MANNOCK. Right !

NITE (*pointing to SQUIER's trumpet*). That's his loot, what he plays on.

SQUIER (*proudly*). I got it at the sack of Jerusalem.

NITE. When there's a sack on, there's always a lot of loots. Almost everybody gets one. I lost mine. (*Carelessly*) Don't mind, because a Nite has such a lot of fighting to do, he can't bother about loots. I say, where's the Buteus Maiden ?

MANNOCK. That's just what I was going to ask *you*.

SQUIER. I'm going to shout for her. Shall we shout for her, Nite ?

NITE. Yes, let's shout for her.

MANNOCK. All together. One, two, three—— *Buteus Maiden !*

NITE (*apologetically*). I don't expect she heard.

SQUIER. Perhaps she's being Sleeping Beauty, and is waiting for Nite to kiss her.

NITE (*rather hot and red*). Shut up, Squier.

MANNOCK. Well, *I* shall try calling " Sally."

NITE. Yes, let's call Sally.

ALL. Sally ! Sally ! Sally !

BUTEUS MAIDEN. Here I am !

(And here she is. Only ten at the moment, but as sweet, as precious, as daintily dignified, as our Sally when she grew up.)

NITE *(rushing to her—even then she was everything to him)*. Oh, Sally, you *have* been a long time. We've found an old, dead gentleman to play with us.

MANNOCK *(indignantly)*. I'm not dead ! I'm not dead !

NITE. Yes, you are. Isn't he, Squier ?

SQUIER. I thought he was at first. And then I thought p'raps he wasn't.

MANNOCK *(almost in tears)*. I'm *not* dead. I shan't play if he says I'm dead.

MAIDEN. Do play ! Then that will show you're not.

MANNOCK. I'm a very important, successful man.

SQUIER. I saw at once he was a very important, successful man, so that's what made me think he was all dead. *(Kindly)* But p'raps he isn't.

MANNOCK *(doggedly)*. I'm *not* dead.

NITE. Yes, he is.

MAIDEN *(to NITE)*. Dear, if he says he isn't dead, I don't think it would be kind not to believe him.

SQUIER. We can pretend he isn't, anyhow.

MAIDEN *(to NITE)*. Please, dear.

NITE *(magnanimously)*. All right, we'll pretend you're alive, and see how you get on.

MANNOCK *(humbly)*. Thank you very much.

NITE *(moving him)*. Now you just stand there, out of the way. What shall we be, Squier ?

SQUIER. I think—I think——

NITE. I know ! We'll be Three Suitors. Sally, you sit over there—— We'll be Three Suitors, Squier.

SQUIER *(wistfully)*. I suppose I shan't be the *Third* Suitor ?

NITE. No, I'll be—— (*Impatiently*) Sally, why don't——

MAIDEN (*sitting down*). Here I am, dear.

NITE (*to MANNOCK*). What would you like to be? You could be another Squier, if you like. (*SQUIER looks sadly at the Buteus Maiden.*)

MAIDEN (*gently*). There couldn't be more than one Squier, dear.

MANNOCK (*hopefully*). Could I be a Lord of High Degree?

NITE (*doubtfully, to MAIDEN*). Could he?

MANNOCK. I'm a Right Honourable, really.

NITE. That's an *awful* thing to be.

MANNOCK (*humbly*). Oh!

SQUIER. Couldn't he just be a wight or a varlet or something?

NITE. A wight of low renowne! A wight of low renowne! That's what he is. Isn't he, Sally?

MAIDEN. If you like, dear.

MANNOCK. Thank you very much.

NITE. Now, Squier goes first. We're all Suitors, and Squier goes first. Go on, Squier. (*In a whisper to MANNOCK*) You go next.

(*SQUIER slopes his gun, makes a long detour of the castle walls, and arrives at the Great Gate. He pulls an imaginary bell.*)

NITE. Bom! Bom! Bom! (*To MANNOCK*) That's the bell ringing inside to summon the agéd Seneschal. Go on, Squier.

SQUIER. What ho, within!

NITE (*as Seneschal*). What ho, without!

SQUIER. Open the door, thou scurvy bald-pate!

NITE. What name, please?

SQUIER. Faithful Squier. I am come to pay attentions to thy mistress, the Buteus Maiden.

NITE. Not at home.

SQUIER. Have a care, agéd man, lest I carve thee to the brisket! (*He pushes past the SENESCHAL into the MAIDEN's presence.*)

MAIDEN (*turning to him*). Who seeks me?

SQUIER. It is I, thy faithful Squier, who loves thee.

MAIDEN. Alas!

SQUIER. If thou wilt wed with me, I will give thee a golden castle, two palfreys, a box of fireworks and—and—lots of things.

MAIDEN (*drooping*). I want none of these things.

SQUIER. Oh! . . . Not even a box of fireworks?

MAIDEN. No.

SQUIER. Oh! (*He salutes*) Good-bye! (*He retreats.*)

NITE. Well done, Squier!

(*SQUIER, rather pleased with himself, lies down and rests.*)

MAIDEN (*kindly*). Dear Squier. (*She resumes her character.*)

NITE (*to MANNOCK*). Now then, Low Renowne, it's your turn.

MANNOCK (*confidently*). Right! (*He marches up to the castle gate and pulls the bell. There is dead silence. He pulls it again. Still there is silence. He looks round, a little alarmed, at NITE*) This bell doesn't ring! (*NITE laughs loudly. MANNOCK rings it again, vigorously, but with no effect. He turns round to NITE again*) I say——(*But NITE and SQUIER have vanished. He calls out loudly, frightened*) I say! (*There is no answer. The BUTEUS MAIDEN still waits silent. MANNOCK suddenly drops the bell, and attempts to push his way into the castle, but DIGBY, the immaculate butler, bars the way.*)

DIGBY. Yes, sir?

MANNOCK. Open the door, thou scurvy bald-pate.

DIGBY (*coldly*). What name, please?

MANNOCK. Wight of Low Renowne.

DIGBY. Then it's no good your hanging about here. Only people of high renown, successful people, are allowed in *this* house.

MANNOCK. Have a care, agèd man, lest I carve thee to the brisket.

DIGBY (*calmly*). Those are my instructions. Her ladyship is not at home to *any* of her husband's old friends. Mr. Selby Mannock says he might perhaps give you a job in the garden, if you come round to the back door.

MANNOCK (*desperately*). But—but I've come to see the Buteus Maiden!

DIGBY (*contemptuously*). Dressed like that?

MANNOCK. You don't understand. I've just come up from the country for a day. (*He turns round*) Nite, how *can* I play this game if—— (*But NITE is not there; and when he turns back, DIGBY has vanished. He rings the bell again. ARTHUR appears.*)

ARTHUR. Name, please.

MANNOCK. Wight of Low Renowne.

ARTHUR (*coldly*). I don't think I know him. Who is he?

MANNOCK. I—I don't—— It was Nite, who——

ARTHUR. *Your* name, I think, is Richard Selby Mannock?

MANNOCK. Y—Yes.

ARTHUR. Then why do you give a false name? It only leads to misapprehension.

MANNOCK. I want to see the Buteus Maiden.

ARTHUR. Dressed like that?

MANNOCK. I—I——

ARTHUR. Look at yourself in the glass! A wight of low renowne! Have a glass of port! Have a cigar! A wight of low renowne!

MANNOCK (*turning round*). Nite! I can't get in!

People keep stopping me ! (*He turns back. ARTHUR has gone. He rings the bell. BERTIE CAPP is there.*)

BERTIE. Name, please.

MANNOCK. Selby Mannock—I mean Wight of Low—(*pathetically*) I don't know.

BERTIE. I thought perhaps it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer ?

MANNOCK. N—no, I don't think so.

BERTIE. What a pity ! Couldn't you work it somehow ? Pull a few strings ? Talk to the Duke ? Square an editor ? I'm sure, if you had a little time, you could think of something. Ask the Archbishop of Canterbury to dinner ! Invent a scandal about Mowbray ! Intrigue a bit ! Surely you can do *something* !

MANNOCK. I—I want to see the Buteus Maiden.

BERTIE. Dressed like that ? Without the Chancellor's robes ?

MANNOCK. I *must* speak to her ! I want to tell her——

BERTIE. You know, that was a damn good speech of yours. The Prime Minister knows what he is talking about, and he was awake practically all the time.

MANNOCK. Let me in ! I must get in !

BERTIE. I don't know what the Prime Minister will say. You see, Eversley—the Garden Eversley—has just given him a month's notice, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—— But, of course, if I were to marry Freda, we should keep it in the family. It all helps.

MANNOCK (*despairingly*). Nite, Squier, where are you ? (*He pulls the bell again. To his surprise it rings—or is it the BUTEUS MAIDEN saying "Bom, bom, bom" ? He takes a step forward, and is there at last—at her feet.*)

MAIDEN (*turning to him*). Who seeks me ?

MANNOCK. Er—er— (*but he can say nothing*).

MAIDEN (*leaning to him*). Tell me.

MANNOCK (*struggling desperately to tell her*). Er—er—

(*and behold ! Reader, his secretary, is prompting him*)
Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen !

MAIDEN (*turning away in disappointment*). Oh !

MANNOCK (*longing to say just the one word " Sally "—
and then, " Sally, I love you ! " but Reader won't have it*).
Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen !

MAIDEN (*sadly*). Have you nothing more to say to me ?

MANNOCK (*after another desperate struggle*). Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen !

MAIDEN (*knowing that it is hopeless*). Alas ! he hath a sickness !

(*And now, suddenly, NITE and SQUIER have him by the arms, and are leading him away.*)

NITE. *That's not the way, is it, Squier ?*

SQUIER (*sadly*). I s'pose he *must* have been dead all the time.

NITE. *I'll show you ! Now you watch me ! (He walks bravely up to the BUTEUS MAIDEN. No door-bells, no parleyings for him.)* Buteus Maiden, I would speak with thee.

MAIDEN. Who seeks me ?

NITE. It is I, thy love-lorn Nite.

MAIDEN (*wistfully*). What wouldst thou, Nite ?

NITE. Fain would I marry thee.

MAIDEN. Ah !

NITE. No jewels do I bring thee ; no golden palaces do I offer thee ; only——

MAIDEN (*whispering*). Only——?

NITE. Only my love and my faithful service.

MAIDEN (*getting down off the wall and giving him her hand*). Then do I plight thee my troth.

(*He goes on one knee to her and kisses her hand. Then, her arm in his, he marches out of the castle, followed by the faithful SQUIER, who plays the War Song of the Dreadnought Nite.*)

MANNOCK (*as they go*). Don't go! Don't go! (*But they go*) Sally! Sally!

SQUIER (*popping back*). Tell her it's Dick calling. (*He hurries back after the others.*)

MANNOCK. Sally! Where are you? It's Dick! (*He goes from one side to the other, calling "Sally!" and then "It's Dick!" And as he comes back to the castle, there she is, sitting on the wall in just the same attitude as that child Sally—and as beautiful, as dear. Nineteen, twenty; and MANNOCK, seeing her, is himself no older, so eagerly his face lights up.*) Ah, Sally, Sally! (*At last he has found her again.*)

SALLY. Here I am, Dick.

MANNOCK. Where have you been? I've been looking for you.

SALLY. Just down by the river.

MANNOCK (*jealously*). What were you doing?

SALLY. Just sitting in the buttercups, looking at the river.

MANNOCK. Is that all?

SALLY (*nodding*). That's all, dear.

MANNOCK (*after a pause*). Did you look at yourself in the river, Sally?

SALLY (*nodding*). Yes.

MANNOCK (*with a deep sigh*). Oh, Sally! (*There is so much that he cannot say, that words cannot express. She cannot help him now. She waits, tremulous*) Sally, listen! (*She is listening. He taps the signal. She nods. Then he sends "I."* *She nods again*) Did you get that?

SALLY. Yes.

MANNOCK. What was it?

SALLY. "I."

MANNOCK. That's right. That's all the word.

SALLY (*to herself*). Dick.

MANNOCK. Listen! (*He taps "L."* *She nods.*)

SALLY (*so gently*). "L."

MANNOCK. That's right. (*He taps "O." She nods.*)

SALLY (*as gently*). "O."

MANNOCK. Yes. (*He taps "V." When he gets as far as "U," he pauses a moment, his hand up. SALLY is waiting breathlessly. With a smile he makes it "V"; out comes her deep sigh of relief; she laughs back at him.*)

SALLY (*nodding*). "V."

MANNOCK. Did you think it would be "V," Sally?

SALLY (*shyly*). I wondered if it might be "V."

MANNOCK (*tapping "E"*). There!

SALLY. "Love!" (*She looks straight in front of her seeing—who shall say what?*) "I love——"

MANNOCK. I haven't finished yet.

SALLY (*softly*). No, you haven't finished yet.

MANNOCK. Shall I do the alphabet backwards for this letter?

SALLY. Does it come at the end of the alphabet?

MANNOCK. It does come rather at the end, Sally.

SALLY (*with a deep sigh of happiness*). I think I'd like you to do it forward, Dick. (*Gently*) To make it longer.

MANNOCK. All right. (*He taps "Y."*)

(*Breathlessly, her chin up, her eyes all love, SALLY is counting.*)

SALLY (*certain now*). Ah!

MANNOCK. Did you know it would be "Y," Sally?

SALLY (*ever so softly*). I think I knew, Dick.

MANNOCK. Did you—did you want it to be "Y," Sally?

SALLY. Oh, I wanted it to be "Y"!

MANNOCK (*holding out his arms to her*). Oh, Sally, Sally, I love you! Could you . . . do you——

SALLY (*nodding*). Always, dearest, always.

MANNOCK. Sally!

(If it were real, he would have her in his arms now, but it is a dream, insubstantial. BERTIE and FREDa are there suddenly, between them. They each have an arm of MANNOCK's, and are marching him away ; yet talking to each other across him, as if he were not there.)

BERTIE. As I said to the Prime Minister, the more these things are kept in the family, the better.

FREDa. That's just what Father said, when Marjory married Robert.

BERTIE. It will be useful for me, my wife being the Chancellor's daughter, and it will be useful for your Father, his daughter being married to the Prime Minister's secretary.

FREDa. Exactly, Bertie. It all helps.

(They have let go of MANNOCK, and are now arm-in-arm, but still talking as if he had never been there.)

BERTIE. In these days, we must stick together, or where are we ?

FREDa. Exactly ! Where are we ?

(And they are gone. But, alas ! SALLY is gone too.)

MANNOCK. Sally ! Where are you ?

(He hurries from one side to the other, calling for her. But it is EVERSLEY, as old as when we last saw him, who appears.)

MANNOCK *(turning round with a shout of welcome)*. Teddy !

EVERSLEY. I beg your pardon ?

MANNOCK *(coming closer)*. I'm sorry, sir—you looked much younger—I thought at first——

EVERSLEY *(smiling)*. Not at all. Very charming of you to think so. You live here, I suppose ?

MANNOCK *(charmingly boyish)*. I'm staying here.

Teddy and I stay here in the vac. sometimes. We're up at Cambridge. At least, we've just come down.

EVERSLEY (*smiling*). And what are you going to do?

MANNOCK. I'm going to the Bar. But—(*shyly*) I want to write.

EVERSLEY. Ah!

MANNOCK. You see, you don't get much money at the Bar, and I *must* have *some*, because you see—you see, Sally and I—we've just got engaged.

EVERSLEY. Oh, youth, youth! Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. But to be young was very heaven!

MANNOCK. Only between ourselves, you know. We shan't tell anybody until I'm making a living.

EVERSLEY. I shan't say a word—except just to myself sometimes, "Bless them."

MANNOCK (*shyly*). I say, thanks awfully. Sally would love that.

EVERSLEY. Perhaps I shall be able to give you a hand later on. I write too. I daresay I could introduce you—a word in the right ear——

MANNOCK. I say, that's awfully decent of you. I don't suppose I'm much good. But it's fun. . . . It is fun, isn't it? I mean being alive . . . and trying . . . and wondering . . . and having somebody else who wonders too. . . . Oh, what a lot there is in the world that nobody knows anything about! All the lovely things! All the precious things! (*Ashamed suddenly*) I say, I'm awfully sorry—talking such rot——

EVERSLEY. Keep on looking for the lovely things. . . . And bless you both.

LADY JANE (*off*). Edward!

(*MANNOCK looks up at the voice.*)

EVERSLEY. There she is!

(*LADY JANE comes on in full evening dress.*)

LADY JANE. Ah, there you are, Edward!

(MANNOCK gazes at her, struggling with horrible memories.)

EVERSLEY. Here I am, my dear. (To MANNOCK) This is my wife, Lady Jane.

MANNOCK (to himself). His wife! (He draws a deep breath of relief) How do you do?

LADY JANE (casually). How do you do? Are we ready, Edward?

EVERSLEY. Yes, my dear.

(They turn and go off together, talking loudly to each other as if MANNOCK were not there.)

LADY JANE. Who is he?

EVERSLEY. Just a nice young man.

LADY JANE. He looks as if he had possibilities. Ask him to Drayton, if you like. He might do. (They are gone.)

MANNOCK (still looking for her). Sally, where are you?
... Sally!

(NITE and SQUIER march across, singing the Dread-nought war song.)

SQUIER (as they disappear). Say it's Dick calling.

MANNOCK. Sally! Where are you? It's Dick!

(And there she is, on her wall again, just as if she had never gone.)

SALLY. Here I am, dear.

MANNOCK (rushing to her). Oh, Sally, I've had the most awful dream! I dreamed—just for a moment—I was married to—somebody else. It was horrible. And then I couldn't find you, and—Oh, Sally, it is you, isn't it? Say it's you.

SALLY (nodding). It is, dearest, it is. Never mind the dream.

MANNOCK. It couldn't happen, could it?

SALLY (trembling). Oh it couldn't, it couldn't. . . .
Oh, if it did!

MANNOCK (*comforting her*). It couldn't, Sally. It will always be you.

SALLY. It was always you. From the very first. Those dear, silly games we played as children—do you remember?—

MANNOCK. I remember.

SALLY. I think I *liked* Teddy better—(*doubtfully*) I think he was *nicer*, Dick—(*hurriedly*) Oh no, no, he wasn't—

MANNOCK. He was. I was a little beast.

SALLY. You weren't, you weren't. It was always you. . . . I loved Teddy; I love him now; it's sort of friendly, loving *him*. But you were different. It's sort of terrible, loving *you*, Dick. You're right in my heart, so twined that it can hardly beat without hurting me. You can't go now; not unless you tear my heart out too.

MANNOCK. I'm happy being in your heart.

SALLY. It was always you. I used to say to myself when we were children, "Squier's heaps nicer, *really*"—(*nodding*) Yes, he was—but Squier couldn't hurt me. Only you could hurt me. I think that was how I knew that I loved you.

MANNOCK. I won't hurt you, darling. Never again.

SALLY (*wistfully, wondering at his innocence*). Oh, my dear! . . . (*Very gently*) If you stop hurting me, I have stopped loving you.

MANNOCK (*softly*). I will stay in your heart.

SALLY (*putting her hands to her heart*). You are all that I have there.

(*They are silent together. . . . Very faintly the War Song of the Dreadnought Nite is heard.*)

SALLY *stands up*.)

SALLY. Come, dearest.

MANNOCK. I come, my beautiful.

SALLY. Into the world, for whatever the world may send, but always together.

MANNOCK. Always together, my lovely.

(They begin to move, but are held there. It is a deputation arriving. The War Song grows louder, as all the people of MANNOCK'S dream file in. Now they are between SALLY and her lover. She calls to him with her eyes, "Come, dearest," but he cannot. . . . She is gone.)

DIGBY. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! The Chancellor of the Exchequer will now put on his robe of office.

(The deputation solemnly presents MANNOCK with the robe and departs with dignity.)

MANNOCK. Half a moment, Sally, I must just put this on. *(He struggles into it)* Sally! *(He looks up, still struggling. She is not there)* Wait a moment, Sally! *(He struggles)* Sally, I must get this on! Don't you understand, dear? . . . *(Frightened)* Sally! Wait for me! *(Desperately)* Sally! . . . Sally!—

(But he has lost her.)

ACT II

SCENE 2 : *A Corner of the Wilderness*

It is early morning, perhaps seven o'clock, in that corner of the Wilderness which we have already seen in MANNOCK'S dream. On the wall sits SALLY, LADY CARCHESTER, a woman in the forties now, but still our SALLY. MANNOCK, seeking the fresh air after a restless night, his dream still strong upon him, comes suddenly upon her.

MANNOCK (*with a shout*). Sally ! Oh, my darling ! (*And then he realises suddenly*) I beg your pardon ! (*He is staggered at what he has said.*) I—I beg your pardon, Lady Carchester. Please forgive me.

SALLY (*smiling sadly*). It's all right.

MANNOCK. I'm really—— What can you think ? My only excuse—but I'm ashamed to give it.

SALLY. Please tell me.

MANNOCK (*with a laugh*). It's absurd. (*Then he tells her*) I dreamt last night—the most vivid, absurd—(*softly*) the most wonderful dream. You and I—here ; first as children, then—afterwards. Sometimes I seemed to be looking on at myself ; in some funny way there were two of me. Sometimes you were a child, sometimes you were grown up. But always it was you and I. Other people came in ; everybody ; you know how ; but always you and I. Here. Just where you are sitting now—just where, just how, you always used to sit. . . . And then I woke up and came out here—it

was early, nobody else could be up—and there you were. Just as you always used to sit.

SALLY (*leaning back on her hands and nodding*). I understand.

MANNOCK. Don't! Don't!

SALLY. What?

MANNOCK (*in distress*). It's the Sally I used to know! Everything. The way she sits, the way she talks, the way she moves. Oh, Sally, don't! (*He recovers himself with an effort*) I beg your pardon.

SALLY (*smiling faintly*). It's all right.

MANNOCK (*trying not to look at her*). I've never had such a real dream. It almost seems as if you must have been dreaming it too. (*With an awkward laugh*) Were you?

SALLY. I have those dreams. (*Poor dear, it's all she has.*)

MANNOCK. I suppose it was being in that room again. (*With a laugh*) There are ghosts in that room, Lady Carchester.

SALLY. There are ghosts in every room—in every corner of the gardens——

MANNOCK. And here.

SALLY. And here. . . .

MANNOCK. It must be—how many years since we met?

SALLY. I don't know. . . . Did your speeches go off well?

MANNOCK. I think so. Yes. I don't know.

SALLY. I expect they did . . . I'm sorry I wasn't up when you came. I went to bed early.

MANNOCK. We were late. Nearly midnight. I dined at the hotel, in between the speeches.

SALLY. I thought you would . . . I thought you wouldn't mind if I was not up when you came.

MANNOCK. But you were. (*She turns to him*) In every

room—in every corner of the house. . . . I tapped on the wall—G.D. (*Gently to himself*) Good-bye, dear. That's "God be with you, dear."

SALLY (*softly*). I heard it.

(*And suddenly, the unearthly sweetness of his dream still with him, MANNOCK forgets that he is married, father of a family, an important and successful man; forgets that this is Lady Carchester. They are boy and girl still, just as in the dream. Is it too late?*)

MANNOCK. Sally, Sally, I love you! Oh, my beautiful, I've always loved you. It's too late now—I've thrown your love away—but I love you, I love you. Oh, just to say it again—I love you.

SALLY (*whispering to herself*). Oh, just to hear you say it again—"I love you."

MANNOCK. I've thrown them away—all the lovely things of life, all the precious things. I've thrown them away—for nothing. Oh, if you could forgive me—it's too late now, but if you could forgive me! I've hurt you, but I've hurt myself more, for it was always you. How can you forgive me? I tore myself out of your heart—you said that would hurt you, Sally—but if you could forgive!

SALLY. I forgive, dearest.

MANNOCK. Success! It closes in on you. That's what Teddy said. I tried to get free—I did try, Sally—but I couldn't. It had got me. It closes in on you.

SALLY. I understand, dearest.

MANNOCK. Oh, but just to say "I love you, Sally," again!

SALLY. Oh, just to hear you say it, dearest.

MANNOCK (*timidly*). I suppose you couldn't say "I love you, Dick." Oh no, how can I ask it?

SALLY. "If you stop hurting me, I have stopped loving you"—do you remember?

MANNOCK (*remorsefully*). Sally!

SALLY (*her hand to her heart*). It has never stopped hurting . . . I had to make something of my life. To sit alone with Pain—(*she shakes her head*) I had to make something of it. But it has never stopped hurting.

MANNOCK. Oh, my dear! Forgive me.

SALLY. It is early. We are alone with the world. This is part of the dream—you and I. And so—I love you, Dick.

MANNOCK (*humbly*). Thank you, Sally.

SALLY (*giving him her hand*). It is part of the dream. (*They are hand in hand—silent.*)

MANNOCK (*quietly*). Need it be a dream? There is so much in the world that nobody knows anything about—is it too late to find it together?

SALLY (*trembling*). It is only part of the dream, dearest.

MANNOCK (*earnestly*). Need it be? Here we are, you and I—need it be a dream?

SALLY (*how she loves him*). Your career.

MANNOCK (*bitterly*). My career! My successful career! (*He tears it away*) Let me get away from it! Help me to get away from it! It is not too late. Come with me, my beautiful.

SALLY (*her last defence*). It means giving up everything.

MANNOCK (*triumphantly*). It means finding everything. . . .

SALLY (*quietly*). I have always loved you. From the first—from the very first. It was always you. It is you now. If you want me—if you think it is not too late—if it would be better for you—(*she breaks off, and then begins again*) I don't know if it's wrong. I don't

know much about Right and Wrong. But I think, perhaps, that there are some wrongs which are better and braver than Right, and some rights which are worse and more destroying than Wrong. . . . It is only of you I am thinking. If it would be better for you—*(she breaks off again, and then nods gently to herself)* I will come with you, dearest.

MANNOCK. Sally, my lovely one! *(He holds out his hands to her; she takes them)* But you *want* to come? You do love me still—after all I've done to you? Say "I love you, Dick."

SALLY *(from her broken heart)*. God knows how I love you, Dick.

MANNOCK. Oh, my dear, my dear! *(He kisses her hands reverently, and is silent for a little. Then, thinking it out slowly, now for the first time seeing the thing as it is, he says)* Now then, you must give me a week, a week to get out of it all, a week to get clear. Sally, you *do* see, don't you? I can't only think of myself—now. Not now. That was the old way—only myself—my success—my career—but now! I must get out of it all first. I must have a week—to get clear.

SALLY *(perhaps she guesses)*. You must have a week—to be certain.

MANNOCK *(confidently)*. Oh, I'm certain enough. *(He laughs happily.)*

SALLY. Yet I want you to have a week. Not seeing me, not writing to me. I can do nothing for you now, dear. It is for you. . . . Here am I. If, at the end of a week, you want me, tell me where you want me, and I will come.

MANNOCK. There is a place I've seen, a little sleepy village between hills; you will feel at rest there. Nobody comes, nobody will know us. When we are there together, then I will try to thank you.

SALLY (*seeing it then, if never afterwards*). I will wait for you to say "Come!"

MANNOCK (*nodding*). A week. Only a week. (*He makes a movement as if to go ; she too*). No, don't move! Let me have this picture of you for our last week away from each other. . . . Hands behind you in that way you always had. There! Sally the child, Sally the girl, Sally the woman—and always my beloved. (*Clasping his hands to her*) Oh, my lovely!

(*He is gone ; she waits there. So it was twenty-five years ago. So it is now.*)

ACT III

SCENE 1 : Cavendish Square

It is the afternoon of the same day. BERTIE, ushered in by DIGBY, comes into the empty library. He has just been told that MR. MANNOCK is not yet home.

BERTIE (*looking at his watch*). I suppose the train was late.

DIGBY. No, sir, apparently not. The car has returned with Mr. Mannock's dressing-case.

BERTIE. Then where——

DIGBY. I understand from Lawson that Mr. Mannock gave instructions that he would be walking home.

BERTIE (*amazed*). Walking ! Why ?

DIGBY. Naturally I can't say, sir, except that it is a fine afternoon, and that Mr. Mannock may have felt in good spirits.

BERTIE. Good spirits ! Good Lord !

DIGBY. Yes, sir. Even if he walked all the way he should be here very soon now, sir. Of course, if he popped on to a 'bus——

BERTIE. My good Digby, you can't pop on to a 'bus without years of practice. If he has taken his life in his hands like that, he may be at Crouch End, or God knows where, by now. Well, I shall wait, if I wait all day.

DIGBY. Yes, sir.

BERTIE. Tell her ladyship I'm here.

DIGBY. Very good, sir.

(*He goes out.* BERTIE *sits down with a paper and waits.* FREDa *comes in.*)

FREDa. Hullo, Bertie.

BERTIE (*getting up and taking her hand*). Hullo, Freda. (*Petulantly*) Why on earth do you let your Father dash off to Cricklewood like this?

FREDa. Is that where he is?

BERTIE. I don't know. Oh, confound their knavish tricks!

FREDa (*surprised*). Bertie, you're quite ruffled.

BERTIE. I've had a ruffling morning.

FREDa. Bobo a trifle tetchy?

BERTIE. If you are referring to the Prime Minister——

FREDa. I am.

BERTIE. The answer is in the affirmative. "Tetchy," perhaps, hardly does it justice.

FREDa. How very grim for you.

BERTIE. Oh, I shall survive.

FREDa. I'm sure you will. You're the surviving sort. (*She sits down.*)

BERTIE (*thoughtfully*). Now I wonder if that's a compliment or not. (*He sits down too.*)

FREDa. Well, I shouldn't have much use for anybody who wasn't a survivor.

BERTIE. Ah, then it *is* a compliment.

FREDa. Of course it is.

BERTIE (*tentatively*). But if he *were* a survivor, if he very distinctly were, then you—you could imagine yourself having some slight use for him?

FREDa (*demurely*). You might go as far as that, Mr. Capp—quite unofficially.

BERTIE. Yes. . . . I'm forty. I just mention it.

FREDa. I'm nineteen. I just throw it out.

BERTIE. In a mid-Victorian novel I should point out sadly that I was old enough to be your father.

FREDA. And in a modern novel I should agree that, if you had married at twenty, and got to work at once, you might just have done it.

BERTIE (*after a pause*). Did I tell you that my Uncle Joseph died the other day?

FREDA. No. . . . My sister's small baby has just been vaccinated.

BERTIE (*reproachfully*). He was the rich one, you know.

FREDA. Oh, I beg his pardon! (*Tactfully*) Did he—was his mind clear at the last?

BERTIE. Perfectly, I'm glad to say.

FREDA. How clear?

BERTIE. About a hundred and twenty thousand.

FREDA (*delighted*). Bertie, what a brain!

BERTIE (*looking at her proudly*). You know, every now and then, you're just like the Freda of ten years ago, who used to sit on my knee and try to wear my eye-glass.

FREDA. My dear Bertie, surely I've sat on your knee since then!

BERTIE. Not so systematically.

FREDA (*sitting on it and wearing his eye-glass*). But how absurd to let these old customs die out. (*After a pause*) Have you actually proposed to me yet?

BERTIE (*with dignity*). I am just going to.

FREDA. I don't want to hurry you.

BERTIE (*beginning*). Freda!

FREDA. Yes?

BERTIE. What about it? I should like to be married to you—tremendously.

FREDA. Nice person.

BERTIE. Would you care about it at all?

FREDA. Terribly.

BERTIE. I think your Father and Mother would like the idea. I don't know if that matters nowadays.

FREDA. My dear Bertie, of course it does. Family quarrels are so vulgar—besides upsetting things. I want you to get on.

BERTIE. Quite. . . . Then that's all right.

FREDA. Yes, that's all right.

BERTIE. Do we celebrate it in the usual way?

FREDA. Well, we shall have to begin some time.
(*Kissing him*) Dear Bertie!

BERTIE (*rather moved*). Thank you. I'll try not to let you down.

(*LADY JANE comes in. BERTIE, full of apologetic noises, struggles to get up.*)

FREDA (*calmly*). Subterfuge is useless, Bertie. (*She gets off his knee*) Bertie has just asked me to marry him, Mother.

LADY JANE (*delighted*). My dear Bertie! How—(*she seeks for the right word*)—how satisfactory! (*She holds out her hand, which he kisses*) I am so glad. (*To FREDA*) Dear child! (*She puts up a cheek.*)

FREDA. Tell her about your Uncle Joseph.

BERTIE. He died, you know, the other day.

LADY JANE. Not unexpectedly, I hope?

BERTIE. Oh, no! On the contrary.

LADY JANE. That's a comfort. And—all satisfactory?

BERTIE. Very.

LADY JANE. You must tell Richard the details. (*To FREDA*) Run along now, dear. Bertie really came here on business, I suspect. (*To him*) Isn't that so?

FREDA (*holding up a finger*). Now, Bertie, don't say I was just an accident.

BERTIE. A delightful interlude.

FREDA. That's better. But I still think——

LADY JANE. Nonsense, Freda, you know how busy Bertie is.

FREDA. "For men must work, and women must weep. . . ." I shall be weeping upstairs, if you want another interlude before you go.

BERTIE (*opening the door for her*). Rather! Of course I do. (*She goes out. He closes the door and comes quickly to LADY JANE*) I say, what about it? You read the speech, of course.

LADY JANE. Naturally.

BERTIE. The P.M.'s furious.

LADY JANE. That's also natural.

BERTIE. Did you know he was going to? I beg your pardon, I oughtn't to have asked you that.

LADY JANE. I knew what Richard's views were. Naturally.

BERTIE. Well, of course, we all did. (*He takes a turn up and down*) Look here, we had a draft of the speech. Knowing his views, the P.M. insisted on it. That draft merely echoed the policy of the Cabinet. It went no further. I brought it back to Mannock the night before last, and told him that the P.M. approved. He goes down to Leeds, gives 'em the speech, and at the critical point throws over the Cabinet and dashes off on his own. Just as we were afraid he would.

LADY JANE. It won't be difficult to explain that.

BERTIE. So I told the P.M. Naturally he feels that he has been done, Mannock having practically promised him that the other speech was——

LADY JANE (*horrified*). Bertie, you're not suggesting anything against Richard's honour!

BERTIE (*equally horrified*). Good Lord, of course I'm not!

LADY JANE. But is the Prime Minister?

BERTIE (*apologetically*). You must make allowances for him. You see, he's just getting over influenza. When

he's quite strong again, he'll see that it's ridiculous to talk about honour—it's just a question of tactics. But at present—well, you know how you feel after influenza.

LADY JANE (*in the voice of one who knows the explanation by heart*). It's perfectly simple. Richard made a private memorandum of his own views, which he intended to lay before the Cabinet. Accidentally, owing to some carelessness of his secretary, this must have been included in the first draft of the speech. When it was discovered, the speech was typed out afresh and sent to the Prime Minister. Richard, again owing to some carelessness, took the earlier draft to Leeds.

BERTIE (*also knowing it by heart*). Quite, quite.

LADY JANE. Richard will tell us what happened then. He may have found himself in the middle of it before he realised that he had the wrong draft, and have been carried away. Or he may have thought that this was the draft which had been submitted to the Prime Minister, and that the P.M., though not approving it, had wished a kite to be flown, knowing that he could always repudiate Richard afterwards.

BERTIE. Quite.

LADY JANE. Of course it was careless of Reader. He has been dismissed, by the way.

BERTIE. Quite. Oh, there are plenty of explanations. And if the P.M. had been in normal health——

LADY JANE. What does he want?

BERTIE. Well, he wants an explanation of some kind, and he wants it for the Press. And he wants something pretty humble from Mannoek personally. And he wants to smoke very badly and can't, because of his throat—that's really what's worrying him.

LADY JANE. Oh! . . . Oh, well! . . . Who's going to the Admiralty?

BERTIE (*uncomfortably*). Nothing's settled as far as I know. And won't be until he's well again.

LADY JANE. Not even Mowbray?

BERTIE. No. . . .

LADY JANE. Bertie, you're one of the family now. Tell me frankly: is it certain that Mowbray will be Chancellor of the Exchequer?

BERTIE. Nothing is certain.

LADY JANE. Oh! Well, that's something. (*After a pause*) Has Leeds done Richard any harm?

BERTIE. At the moment, yes, certainly. Ultimately, I should say, no.

LADY JANE. He's played the wrong card?

BERTIE. I think so. But you never know. The P.M.'s queer in some ways. And it depends a little on how the Press takes it up. They were very non-committal this morning.

LADY JANE. In the circumstances, to be non-committal is to be on our side.

BERTIE. Quite. . . . (*Looking at his watch*) But where is he, where is he? What's all this about walking home?

LADY JANE. Walking home? What do you mean?

BERTIE. Why, Digby said—— (*and now MANNOCK comes in*) Ah!

MANNOCK (*cheerfully*). Hullo, Bertie. Digby told me you were here. (*To his wife*) Ah, you've been looking after him. That's good. (*He is younger than when we first saw him, more eager.*)

BERTIE. We wondered what had happened to you.

MANNOCK. I sent the car on and walked. It was such a jolly afternoon.

LADY JANE. Walked! From Euston? (*She looks at him in amazement.*)

MANNOCK. Yes. Such a jolly afternoon.

LADY JANE. Oh! . . . (*Before words come to her, she decides that, after all, it doesn't matter very much.*) Bertie has come round about the speech.

MANNOCK (*at a loss*). Speech?

LADY JANE. He thinks it was a mistake in tactics, as it turns out.

BERTIE. Yes, but there's more to it than that. The P.M.—

MANNOCK. Oh, the speech! Oh, I see.

LADY JANE. I was telling him that that could easily be explained.

BERTIE. Quite.

LADY JANE. He thinks—oh, by the way, we may regard Bertie as one of the family now. Freda—

BERTIE. Please.

LADY JANE. Freda—

MANNOCK. Freda and Bertie?

LADY JANE. Yes. I have told Bertie how delighted we are.

MANNOCK (*violently*). No! I won't have it!

LADY JANE (*amazed*). Richard!

BERTIE (*equally amazed*). Why, what—

MANNOCK (*recovering himself with an effort*). I beg your pardon.

LADY JANE. But I don't understand. Only the other day—

MANNOCK. I want Freda to marry for love . . . I'm sorry, Bertie. Perhaps she does love you.

BERTIE (*embarrassed*). Well, I—I don't understand. I asked her to marry me, and she—apparently she—

MANNOCK. Are you in love with *her*?

BERTIE (*out of his depth*). Well, I—I asked her to marry me, and— Yes, of course I am. I mean— (*bewildered*) I don't understand.

MANNOCK. Good God, man, you must know if you're in love or not.

LADY JANE (*interposing firmly*). Bertie, perhaps you wouldn't mind fetching Freda.

BERTIE (*relieved*). Right. [*He goes out.*]

LADY JANE. Thank you . . . Richard, what's the matter? What has happened?

(MANNOCK *takes a turn up the room, wondering how much to tell her, when to tell her.*)

MANNOCK (*looking up suddenly*). Do you mean about Freda?

LADY JANE. Why this sudden change? Two nights ago we were both saying——

MANNOCK. That's just it. I want to be sure that she is not doing it just because she thinks we want it.

LADY JANE. I probably know Freda better than you——

MANNOCK. I don't know her at all.

LADY JANE. Then you may take my word for it that, if she marries anybody, it will be because she wants to do so.

MANNOCK (*thoughtfully*). Yes, I suppose so. (*With a laugh to himself*) After all, it hasn't really very much to do with me—now.

LADY JANE. Naturally we both want her to be happy. Bertie has come into money, he tells me. I suppose he was waiting for that. I think it's the most satisfactory thing that could have happened.

MANNOCK (*thoughtfully*). Yes, I'm not sure that it isn't.

LADY JANE. Well, then!

MANNOCK. Yes. . . . (*To himself*) God, how difficult it all is, when you get close to it.

LADY JANE. All what?

MANNOCK (*waving his hands*). Life. Everything.

(*Before LADY JANE can take his temperature, BERTIE and FREDa come in.*)

FREDa. What is it?

MANNOCK. Come here, Freda. (*She comes to him, looking up into his face*) Fond of Bertie?

FREDa (*smiling*). I've adored him for years.

MANNOCK. Going to be happy with him?

FREDa. I hope so.

MANNOCK (*kissing her forehead*). Well, good luck to you both. (*Shaking Bertie's hand*) Good luck to you, Bertie.

LADY JANE. I think Freda is a very lucky girl. Bertie has a wonderful career in front of him.

BERTIE (*modestly*). Well, I hope——

FREDa. Oh, Bertie's all right.

MANNOCK (*with a note of dismissal*). All right, Freda. I just wanted to feel quite sure—— That's all right, Bertie.

[BERTIE opens the door for FREDa, who goes out.

LADY JANE. Now then, tell Richard just what you were telling me. (*She sits down for it.*)

BERTIE (*coming back to them*). Well, what it really comes to——

MANNOCK (*smiling to himself happily*). I have sent in my resignation to the Prime Minister.

LADY JANE. Richard! Is that wise? At this moment? (*She turns to Bertie for help*) Bertie?

BERTIE (*shaking his head*). He's in the mood to accept it. You can't hold a pistol to his head just now.

LADY JANE. That's what I felt. (*Anxiously to her husband*) Has the letter gone?

MANNOCK. It has gone.

BERTIE. Good Lord!

LADY JANE. Is it too late? (*To BERTIE*) Can't you——

MANNOCK (*patiently*). I have resigned. He will accept my resignation. He can't help himself. Well, I intend him to. That's why I resigned.

LADY JANE (*with restraint*). I don't want to—I daresay you know best. But surely it was a matter which should have been discussed first. You must think that it was wise, or you wouldn't have done it. But at least let us hear your reasons. Here are Bertie and I, only too anxious to help.

(MANNOCK looks at her—and at BERTIE. A smile comes on to his face as he imagines himself saying, “Well, the fact is, I am running away with another woman.” Impossible, of course, with BERTIE there. Impossible anyhow, yet. He cannot mention SALLY'S name in this atmosphere; cannot hint that there is another woman, for fear of SALLY being identified. Impossible to discuss her, them, the situation, with anybody. Unless it were a friend of SALLY'S. EVERSLEY, perhaps. But he must be out of the Government first. Some such thoughts as these are in his mind, even if we cannot read them.)

MANNOCK. Well, yes, that's reasonable. And yet—it's no good. I can't explain now. Except to say that I'm doing it with my eyes open. (*In a whisper*) At last. (*To LADY JANE*) You must give me a week—then I'll explain everything.

LADY JANE (*uncertain*). Well—of course you know best—

BERTIE (*quite certain*). That's all right, Lady Jane. (*He almost winks at her*) I understand.

LADY JANE. Do you really think—

BERTIE. You never can tell with the P.M. I've said that before. Mannock's way—he has always played

his cards well—there's something up his sleeve—you leave it to him.

(MANNOCK *has wandered away in search of an A.B.C. Trains don't touch that sleepy little village between hills, but they can bring lovers within reach of it. Just to look up the train is something.*)

LADY JANE (*nodding to BERTIE*). Very well. If you think——

BERTIE. He knows what he's doing.

LADY JANE. Very well, Richard. You do it your own way. Meanwhile——

BERTIE. Meanwhile no harm in letting it be known that——

LADY JANE. Important changes in the Cabinet are pending.

BERTIE. Well, yes, *that*——

LADY JANE. I'll ask Roger Coombes to lunch to-morrow, and drop a hint.

BERTIE. Yes. . . . I was going to say that I could let fall a word or two. By the way, perhaps we'd better say nothing about Freda until this is safely over. I should like to be able to preserve my impartiality for what it's worth. A suggestion that, from what I have seen of Mannoek lately, he is tired of the confinements of his present office——

LADY JANE. And that a post of greater freedom——

BERTIE. And more responsibility—exactly. (*Chuckling*) Otherwise he seriously thinks of retiring from public life altogether.

LADY JANE (*laughing at the absurdity of it*). I think that can be safely left to you, Bertie. And you're right about Freda. I hope she hasn't been ringing up all her friends. I'd better see about that at once.

BERTIE. I'll come along too. Well, so long, Mannoek.

MANNOCK (*who was just stepping out of the train*).
Going?

BERTIE. You'll be seeing some more of me before very long, I expect. (*With sudden enthusiasm*) By Jove, if you play this hand properly, I believe—well, almost anything might happen.

MANNOCK (*happily*). I believe it might, Bertie.

[LADY JANE and BERTIE go out.]

(MANNOCK, *with the A.B.C. in his hands, is back in the train with SALLY. . . . This time it is*
READER *who interrupts them.*)

READER. Are you busy, sir?

MANNOCK (*looking up*). No . . . no.

READER (*formally*). I gather, from what I have read in the papers, that I accidentally gave you the wrong draft of the speech. It was very careless of me, and I wish to express my regret.

MANNOCK (*smiling*). *Very* careless of you, Reader.

READER (*his first smile in MANNOCK's house*). I thought I had better mention it.

MANNOCK. Thank you. . . . But we are not bothering about that now.

READER. Oh?

MANNOCK. No. Life has other things to offer than speeches at Leeds. . . . (*Suddenly remembering*) By the way, what were you trying to tell me about Mrs. Reader the other day?

READER (*distressed*). I oughtn't to have—it was only in the shock of your—

MANNOCK (*smiling*). Yes, never mind all that. I should like to know, if you would like to tell me.

READER (*awkwardly, after a pause*). She—we—we're going to have a baby.

MANNOCK. Ah! . . . The first? (READER *nods*)
Frightened? (READER *nods again*.)

READER (*suddenly*). I—I do love her so.

MANNOCK (*gently*). How long have you been married?

READER. Ten years. . . . It's like yesterday.

MANNOCK (*moved*). Yes. . . . Oh, before I forget, I'd better write to Carfax. I know he wants somebody. *He goes to his desk* Sit down, won't you?

READER. Thank you very much. It's very kind of you. You see, I haven't liked to tell her yet—

MANNOCK (*writing*). Well, don't, until we've got this fixed up.

READER. No.

MANNOCK. I daresay Carfax will stand for another fifty, if he's sure he's getting the right man. Then that will be a pleasant surprise for her.

READER (*thawing*). I am afraid she won't look at it quite like that. You see, she is—if I may say so—very much interested in you. In your career. She will be sorry to. . . . You see, we often talk about you in the evenings. We wonder what you are going to do. Having no career of our own, so to speak—

MANNOCK (*writing*). No career of your own. Lucky man!

READER. We find our interest in following yours. I believe that if I could go home to-morrow and tell my wife—before it got into the papers, you understand—that you were to be the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, she would be as happy and excited as if it had happened to me.

MANNOCK (*with a laugh for the vanity of these things*) Chancellor of the Exchequer, eh? (*Shaking his head*) No, Reader, no.

READER. Well, that's as may be. . . . (*Enthusiastically*) To be Chancellor of the Exchequer! Think of the power it gives you! To know that there isn't a house in the whole country which isn't waiting for *your*

decision—from the tiniest cottage to the hugest castle ! Not a family that won't be affected ! It must be wonderful. The power of affecting all those people ! It has always seemed to me the supreme goal for any man to reach. (*Apologetically*) Sometimes we have pretended—only in play, you understand—that it was I who had reached it . . . we have wondered . . . the power it gives you . . . (*he sees himself there, Ethel with him*)—we have talked over what we should do——

(*And MANNOCK has been seeing himself there too. Just for a moment he has been there.*)

MANNOCK (*with a sigh*). Yes. . . . (*Then he is back with SALLY again. Gently he says*) But there is something better than that. Something. . . . (*You can see him thinking of it, smiling. . . . But now his thoughts have changed ; the smile gives place to a frown. The career is fighting its way back into his mind. Fighting with SALLY. He jerks his head round at READER, READER who is tempting him, and says sharply*) Chancellor of the Exchequer, eh ? No, Reader, no. (*Returning to the letter*) I shan't be a moment.

ACT III

SCENE 2 : *Cavendish Square.* MANNOCK's library.

It is afternoon, two days later. MANNOCK is alone, restlessly doing nothing. ARTHUR comes in.

ARTHUR. Busy ?

MANNOCK (*looking up*). No . . . no.

ARTHUR. Thought I'd say good-bye. I'm just off.

MANNOCK. Off ?

ARTHUR. Yes, that's right, isn't it ? You said you didn't want me till the end of the month.

MANNOCK (*remembering*). Oh ! . . . Oh, yes. (*He remembers that now he won't want ARTHUR at all*) Yes. *With an effort* What are you going to do ?

ARTHUR. Going to Marjory's for a week. Then down to Cornwall for a little golf.

MANNOCK (*remembering his elder daughter*). Marjory. . . Yes. (*How complicated life is !*)

ARTHUR. Any messages for any of them ?

MANNOCK. Yes—no. I'll write. (*To himself*) Yes, I shall have to write to Marjory.

ARTHUR. Right. Then if I'm back by the 30th, that will do ?

MANNOCK (*after a silence*). Arthur !

ARTHUR. Yes ?

MANNOCK. I've sent in my resignation.

ARTHUR. Your resignation ? Why ? Oh, I see.

The old resignation stunt. Hasn't that been rather overdone ?

MANNOCK. You don't understand, Arthur——

ARTHUR. All these political tactics—there's something so tawdry about them, so shoddy, so—— Sorry, Father, I was forgetting. I'm a neutral now. Well, I suppose I shall get used to them.

MANNOCK. I say again, I have resigned my seat in the Cabinet.

ARTHUR (*with a smile*). If you're not careful, the P.M. will accept it, and then where will you be ?

MANNOCK (*sharply*). Out of the Cabinet, which is where I want to be.

ARTHUR. Not really ? Why ? (MANNOCK *shrugs his shoulders*.) No, but why, Father ?

MANNOCK. I'm tired of it. I want to get out of it all.

ARTHUR (*eagerly*). I say ! You're not crossing over, are you ? How terribly sporting of you !

MANNOCK (*firmly*). I'm giving up politics altogether.

ARTHUR (*his jaw falling*). Giving up——? Then what about me ?

MANNOCK. That's been worrying me.

ARTHUR. Worrying you ! I should think it had ! You made me chuck a jolly good job to come to *you*, and then when it's been filled up by somebody else——

MANNOCK. Are you sure ? I hoped that perhaps——

ARTHUR (*shaking his head gravely*). I say, Father, this really is a bit steep.

MANNOCK (*humbly*). I'm very sorry, Arthur. I'm to blame. I never ought to have persuaded you to come to me. It was your career to choose for yourself. I'm sorry.

ARTHUR (*still aggrieved*). You practically ruin a man's life——

MANNOCK (*smiling sadly*). Twenty-two, aren't you ?

No man's life is ruined at twenty-two. (*With sudden motion*) Oh, my God, to be twenty-two again!

ARTHUR. Well, but I mean——

MANNOCK. Arthur, forget all that I've said to you, will you, just for a week? Enjoy yourself at Marjory's, don't say anything to her about it, and I'll write to you. I can't talk about it now—not for another week. Will you do that for me?

ARTHUR (*reluctantly*). Oh, all right. (*Looking thoughtfully at his father*) You know, I believe it is a stunt, after all. A super-stunt. I don't know what the game is——

[*Enter DIGBY.*]

DIGBY. Mr. Eversley is here, sir.

MANNOCK. Yes, that's right, Digby. Show him in here.

ARTHUR (*to DIGBY*). Is the car here?

DIGBY. Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

ARTHUR. Then I'll be getting on. (*Holding out his hand*) Good-bye, Father—and I'll wait for your letter.

MANNOCK. Yes. (*Taking his hand*) Good-bye, Arthur. (*When will he see him again?*) Good-bye, old boy. Good luck to you always.

ARTHUR (*a little surprised*). Thanks! [*He goes out.*]

(*MANNOCK walks up and down, thinking, thinking.*

How difficult it all is! . . . Then DIGBY announces EVERSLEY.)

DIGBY. Mr. Eversley.

MANNOCK (*cagerly*). I knew you would come. (*To DIGBY, who still waits*) What is it? (*DIGBY presents a letter*) Oh, put it down. (*DIGBY walks across to the writing-desk and places the letter there*) Were you in London, or did I drag you up from the country? I had to see you. [*DIGBY goes out.*]

EVERSLEY. Well, I *was* at home, but of course I was only too glad to come up, if you wanted me.

MANNOCK (*looking at him fondly*) I never ought to have let you go, Teddy. I ought always to have kept you with me.

EVERSLEY (*happy at the "Teddy"*). And what should I have been doing all the time?

MANNOCK (*settling him in a chair*). Nothing. Just admiring me. What else is a Squier for?

EVERSLEY. What else? The world is full of Nites and Squiers—the admired and the admiring. I wonder which are the happier?

MANNOCK (*gently*). The loved and the loving.

EVERSLEY. Yes. Which are the happier, Dick?

MANNOCK (*suddenly, after a little silence*). Got your pipe with you? (EVERSLEY *nods*.) Well, fill it, then.

EVERSLEY (*taking it out*). It is filled.

MANNOCK. Well, light it, then.

EVERSLEY (*lighting it*). There! (*He smokes.*)

MANNOCK. Teddy, I'm giving it all up.

EVERSLEY. All what?

MANNOCK. Everything. Politics. My career. My successful career.

EVERSLEY (*smoking placidly*). Any particular reason?

(MANNOCK *looks at him, and hesitates. Then he gives reasons—but not the particular reason.*)

MANNOCK. It's odd how wrapped up in my career I have been. I never saw it from outside. I've been looking at it lately. I think it was you—that other night—who made me struggle outside and look at it. You were the first. That was the beginning of it.

EVERSLEY. I had no idea I was precipitating a political crisis. What did I say?

MANNOCK. You said "And then success closed in on you."

EVERSLEY. Yes, I remember. But I apologised for it.

MANNOCK. It's a stifling thing, success. It shuts out

so much. (*Gently*) All the lovely things, all the precious things . . . I've been looking back at my career. After all, he's in a position of trust, a Cabinet Minister. He is responsible for the happiness of the people, his fellow countrymen and women. How often have I thought of their happiness? How often of my personal triumph—my success? What are all our intrigues for, our strategy, our tactics? To improve the condition of England? Or to improve our personal position? I look back on my career, and never once can I say, "He did that for others."

EVERSLEY. The others are no better.

MANNOCK. That isn't a very proud thought for—

EVERSLEY. For a Dreadnought Nite?

MANNOCK. Don't! . . . Oh, my God, to be twenty-two again!

EVERSLEY. What would you do?

MANNOCK. Live. There is so much that I have missed. All the lovely things of life. But, perhaps, even now, it isn't too late.

EVERSLEY (*after smoking in silence for a little*). And so you're giving it all up?

MANNOCK. Yes. This is between ourselves, of course, until it is made public.

EVERSLEY. Of course. . . . It's a big career to give up, as the world judges it.

MANNOCK (*a little vain of his sacrifice*). I suppose it is.

EVERSLEY. They were talking politics in the train—as they always do—and one or two of them were saying that you ought to be the new Chancellor of the Exchequer.

MANNOCK (*pleased*). Oh? Oh, but I shouldn't have been anyhow. Mowbray.

EVERSLEY. They didn't seem to think very much of Mowbray.

MANNOCK. He's the obvious man.

EVERSLEY. A little too obvious, they felt. . . .

MANNOCK (*after a pause*). It was my one ambition in the old days.

EVERSLEY (*smiling*). Not such very old days.

MANNOCK (*a little annoyed*). You know what I mean . . . I wanted to be that, even more than to be Prime Minister. It fascinated me.

EVERSLEY. It would terrify *me*.

MANNOCK. I think I've only realised lately how much I wanted it; how certain I was I could be one of the Great Ones. . . . It may never come now. (*Remembering suddenly*) Well, of course *now* it never will—obviously. (*He sighs*) I'm well out of it all. But even if—I mean Mowbray—well, he'll last this Government—and after the next Election, who knows? (*He is thoughtful*.)

EVERSLEY. And what are you going to do when you retire?

MANNOCK. Teddy, you do think I'm right, don't you?

EVERSLEY. Well, I don't quite know all the circumstances, do I?

MANNOCK. I must have *you* on my side. Everybody here—well, naturally——

EVERSLEY. They think you're mad? They've sent for the doctor?

MANNOCK. They simply don't believe it. But *you*—you're not prejudiced—*you* think——?

EVERSLEY. Aren't I prejudiced?

MANNOCK. You?

⁴ EVERSLEY (*through clouds of smoke*). I had a friend once. I lived with him, played with him, made plans with him, for—how many years? I was fond of him, Dick. I don't think he knew how fond we were of him, Sally and I; two of the admiring ones, the loving ones; yes, the happier ones. Then I lost him . . .

and more than twenty years afterwards I found him again. And he was dead. Now you say that he is coming to life again, and you ask me to tell you—quite without prejudice—whether I should like him to come to life again. . . . It is a little difficult for me, Dick, to be quite unprejudiced.

MANNOCK (*remorsefully*). Teddy!

EVERSLEY (*a little wistfully*). But—I *should* like to find him again, you know. Just to talk to him about those—rather jolly days.

MANNOCK. They *were* good days.

EVERSLEY. Perhaps we didn't realise at the time how good they were.

MANNOCK. Do you remember—(*he breaks off impetuously*) Oh, Teddy, there are a hundred things I want to talk to you about, a hundred things I want to tell you.

EVERSLEY. Well, that's why I came.

MANNOCK. I know. (*Suddenly*) Teddy! I—(*and then he pulls himself up*) No, I can't tell you now. Not here. I must see you—where can I see you? Not in this house. Where can I see you, where can we really talk?

EVERSLEY. Couldn't we dine together somewhere?

MANNOCK. Yes, that's it. Somewhere where we can be by ourselves. Now, let me think—

EVERSLEY. "The Cock," in Fleet Street? Not many people there in the evening.

MANNOCK. That will do. . . . I wonder what you'll think. . . . But I can't tell you here. . . . I'll call for you. Where are you staying? Your club?

EVERSLEY. I am staying with friends. At Porchester Terrace. But they don't expect me to dinner.

MANNOCK. Then I'll call for you at a quarter to eight. What number? You'd better write it down. (EVERSLEY *takes out a card*) Got a pencil?

EVERSLEY (*feeling in his pockets*). Somewhere.

MANNOCK (*going to the desk*). Here you are. (*And then he sees the letter and stops short.*)

EVERSLEY (*finding his own*). It's all right. (*He writes the address.*)

(MANNOCK *gazes at the letter. This is from the Prime Minister—to accept his resignation. So his career is over. He stands there, letter in hand, breathing heavily as if he had been running.* EVERSLEY *looks at him in surprise.*)

MANNOCK. When did this—

EVERSLEY. What is it?

MANNOCK (*turning, letter in hand*). How long—

EVERSLEY. Your butler brought it in, didn't he, when he brought me in?

MANNOCK. Yes, of course.

EVERSLEY. Don't mind me, Dick, if it's important.

MANNOCK. No, no, it's nothing. I—

(LADY JANE *comes in, followed by BERTIE. They are obviously excited.*)

LADY JANE (*eagerly*). Richard! (*She sees EVERSLEY*) Oh, I—(*coldly*) Oh, how do you do, Mr. Eversley?

EVERSLEY. How do you do, Lady Jane? I was just going. (*He and BERTIE nod to each other*) Well, good-bye, Dick. (*Giving him the card*) Here's the address. And a quarter to eight?

MANNOCK (*mechanically*). Yes, yes. Good-bye. (*He rings the bell, and puts down the card.*)

EVERSLEY (*to LADY JANE*). Good-bye. (*To BERTIE*) Good-bye. (*BERTIE nods.*)

LADY JANE (*with an effort*). Oh, but we mustn't drive you away like this.

EVERSLEY (*smiling pleasantly*). But I really was going. Good-bye.

LADY JANE. Good-bye.

[DIGBY is there to show him out. He goes
(All this time MANNOCK has been standing with the
unopened letter in his hands, fingering the
envelope.)

LADY JANE (*in suppressed excitement*). Richard! Bertie
says. . . . Why, what's that? (*She is looking at the
letter*) But that's—why don't you open it? That's the
letter. Open it! Open it!

MANNOCK (*dully*). This is just acknowledging and
accepting my resignation.

LADY JANE. But have you opened it yet? (*She
snatches it from him, looks at it, and gives it back to him*)
But you haven't opened it yet! Open it! Bertie
says—

BERTIE. The omens are distinctly favourable. But—
well, now we shall know.

MANNOCK (*opening it*). It's only just to accept my
resignation. (*He reads. You can see at once that it is
not that.*)

LADY JANE (*watching his face*). It is! (*MANNOCK looks
in front of him, seeing visions*) May I—(*she takes the
letter from him*) I must. (*She reads*) Oh, well done,
Richard!

(*MANNOCK stands there, breathing heavily. To be
Chancellor of the Exchequer!*)

BERTIE. He has? (*She nods*) By Jove! Congratulations!

LADY JANE. I never thought—

BERTIE. Well, I don't know. Mowbray has a good
deal against him one way and another.

LADY JANE. Yes. But I was almost afraid to
hope.

BERTIE (*proudly*). Didn't I tell you to leave it to
him? (*He nods towards MANNOCK.*)

LADY JANE. Yes, you were quite right, Bertie. (*She looks admiringly at her husband.*)

BERTIE. Of course, I know all about the resignation stunt—it's as old as the hills. But if you can do it with conviction, you can still pull it off sometimes.

LADY JANE. Yes, yes.

BERTIE. Mannock carried conviction—that's where he's such an artist. The P.M. really thought he was going. Didn't dare to lose him. Prepared to offer anything to keep him.

LADY JANE. Yes.

BERTIE. I've always said that, in the matter of political strategy, Mannock can give them all points. Even the P.M. I knew he'd pull it off.

LADY JANE. Richard! (*She means "Come and talk to us."*)

MANNOCK (*his control suddenly giving way*). So you knew I'd pull it off? (*He is almost shouting.*)

BERTIE. Rather!

MANNOCK. I can give 'em all points in political strategy?

BERTIE. I've always said so.

MANNOCK. And I carry conviction—eh?—that's where I'm such an artist.

BERTIE. Exactly. (*MANNOCK gives a loud, bitter laugh.*) Well, I mean——

MANNOCK (*half hysterically*). An artist! That's what I am. Carry conviction! I carried conviction all right. I pulled *your* leg pretty well, Bertie. (*To LADY JANE*) And yours. You thought I meant to resign—yes, you did, both of you—you thought I meant it—you were frightened to death, yes, you were. You thought I really meant to give it all up. So did Arthur. I had Arthur in here just now—frightened to death—thought I meant to give it all up—talked about *his*

career—his career!—my God!—frightened to death he was, just like you two. Ha! I pulled your legs pretty well. Resign? Why the devil should I resign? Haven't I got what I always wanted? You ask Reader—he'll tell you—the supreme goal for any man to reach. Chancellor of the Exchequer—that gives you power. Me! I've done it! Just pure strategy. Pretending I wanted to give up politics. Why should I? Success—it closes in on you! My God, there's nothing I can't do! Nothing! (*His voice rises almost to a shriek, as he drops into a chair, and sits there, his hands over his face, his shoulders shaking with long, tearless sobs.*)

BERTIE (*soothingly*). I say, old fellow——

LADY JANE (*quietly*). No. Go, Bertie.

BERTIE. Oh, right. (*Going*) I'll come in this evening if I can. He'll be all right? (*She nods.*) Right.

[*He goes out.*]

LADY JANE (*putting an arm calmly on MANNOCK'S shoulders*). It's all right now, Richard. I know how you must feel. It has been a very anxious time for both of us. But it's all over now. You've got what you wanted. I'm proud of you, very proud of you.

MANNOCK (*pulling himself together*). I'm sorry. I——

LADY JANE (*calmly*). It's all right. I understand perfectly. The strain—naturally.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. I'll leave you now. You'll want to be alone. But come and talk to me afterwards.

MANNOCK (*nodding*). Yes.

LADY JANE (*giving him the letter*). You'll want to answer this.

MANNOCK. Yes. Thank you.

LADY JANE (*looking at him admiringly*). I'm very proud of you, Richard.

[*She goes out.*]

(*Alone, MANNOCK walks slowly to his desk, a tired*

man. There, he sees EVERSOLEY's card, picks it up, looks at it, puts it down, and takes up the telephone.)

MANNOCK (*at the telephone*). Hullo! Come in, will you? (*He goes back to his chair and waits. READER comes in, note-book in hand.*) I want a telegram sent at once. To Mr. Eversley. You'll find a card on my desk. (*READER goes there*). Got it? With an address in Porchester Terrace.

READER. Yes, sir. (*He writes down the name and address and waits.*)

MANNOCK. "Afraid cannot dine to-night."

READER (*writing*). "Afraid cannot dine to-night."

MANNOCK. That's all.

READER. Signed?

MANNOCK. Yes, "Dick." . . . (*An end to this weakness. He corrects himself firmly*) No—Mannock.

READER. "Afraid cannot dine to-night. Mannock." . . . Anything else, sir?

MANNOCK. No. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . (*READER waits*) Another telegram.

READER (*waiting*). Yes?

MANNOCK. Lady Carchester, Enderways, Riley, Yorkshire.

READER (*murmuring to himself*). Enderways, Riley, R-I-L-E-Y?

MANNOCK. Yes.

READER. Yorkshire. (*He waits*).

MANNOCK (*after a long pause*). "I beg your pardon." (*READER says nothing. MANNOCK looks up*) That's all.

READER. Oh, I beg—I see—I didn't understand. (*Writing*) "I beg your pardon."

MANNOCK. We had a—a discussion. I—I was wrong. I have found out since that I was wrong. This is—(*he shrugs*).

READER (*pleasantly*). A very graceful way of saying
o, if I may be allowed——

MANNOCK (*to himself*). Graceful !

READER (*after waiting*). Signed ? Or will she under-
stand ?

MANNOCK. She will understand. (*To himself, ashamed*)
think she will understand. . . . All right, Reader.

[READER goes out.

(MANNOCK *walks slowly to his desk. For a little
while he sits there, holding the letter in his
hand. . . .*

SALLY is dead. He has killed her. No good
explaining, apologising, whining, to a person
whom you have killed. Let him be man enough
to spare her that last insult. No, there's nothing
to say. It was EVERSOLEY and that damned
tune that got into a man's head, and made him
dream. . . . The sweetness of her in his dream !
But that was twenty-five years ago. They're
dead now ; both dead. . . . But—Chancellor
of the Exchequer ! It will be in all the papers
to-morrow. Chancellor of the Exchequer ! What
will the papers say ? What will people say ?
Everybody will see it. . . . Sally will see it.
Will know, will understand. No, there's nothing
to be said. That damned tune, that damned
dream. O Sally, Sally, Sally ! Don't !
Don't come into my dreams again. . . .

So for a little he sits, thinking. Then, with a bitter,
contemptuous laugh, he tosses away his thoughts
and comes back to the letter. Chancellor of the
Exchequer ! Briskly he dips his pen into the
ink, and writes to the Prime Minister.)



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